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A BRIEF
STATEMENT
AND
DECLARATION
OF THE GENUINE
PRINCIPLES OF SECEDERS,
RESPECTING
CIVIL GOVERNMENT;
THE DUTY OF SUBJECTS;
AND NATIONAL REFORMATION:
AND A
VINIFICATION
OF THEIR CONDUCT
IN REFERENCE TO
SOME LATE PLANS AND SOCIETIES FOR
POLITICAL REFORM;
AND THE PUBLIC DISSENTIONS OF
THE TIME.

*Proposed and Read in a Meeting of the General Associate
Synod in Scotland,*

WITH AN APPENDIX,
*Containing an Account of the Synods Procedure on this
Business.*

BY A. BRUCE,
Minister of the Gospel, at Whitburn.

*Sold by J. OGLE, and J. GUTHRIE, Edinburgh:—
M. OGLE; J. STEEL & Co, Glasgow:—G. BROWN,
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P R E F A C E.

AT a time, when several nations of Europe were shaken in the storm of public revolution, and all the world was engaged, either in applauding, or reprobating, the new schemes of policy, or the new application of the principles of the old, when our own kingdoms were greatly agitated by domestic controversies, and about to be deeply involved in foreign wars, by taking an active part in the contests, the uncommon situation of affairs, called forth from almost all public bodies of men, secular or religious, some declaration of their sentiments, and of their dutiful disposition towards the interests of the nation, and its government. At this time, when questions were revived, and measures debated, that had a near relation to the ecclesiastical, as well as civil state of the British empire, and when the minds of the people at large were tossed between the conflicting waves, and in no small danger of being impelled to dangerous extremes, on the one hand or the other, a motion was made in the Provincial Synod of Edinburgh, subordinate to the General Associate Synod in Scotland, for preparing an Address to the people belonging to their body, to direct their conduct amidst the snares and dangers of that critical time, to remind them of their duty to those in authority, and to inculcate peaceable behaviour in society

ty, agreeably to their Christian profession, and on grounds not inconsistent with the principles and engagements adopted in their religious association. At the same time, it was proposed to state and declare anew, these leading principles which they, as a society, had adopted, in regard to civil government, the British in particular ; and, to shew that their adherence to a religious testimony, covenants, and contendings for reformation as not inconsistent with such a dutiful attachment to it as they had all along in practice maintained. This last was reckoned peculiarly needful and seasonable, when all popular associations, having a reform for their object, were ready to fall under indiscriminate condemnation or proscription ; and, as they, among others, had been particularly marked out, through the ignorance or malevolence of some, as abettors of sedition, and as friendly to the principles and measures that turned the world upside down. It was thought that they owed something to the world, and to themselves, at such a time ; and that, instead of declining to avow their principles, or explain their views, ' they, as being loudly called to it, should also shew their opinion,' in reference to public evils, and exhibit without disguise their wishes and plan for reformation, that all might judge how far they agree, and how much they differ from those which have raised such a ferment in the world.

An Address, answering in particular to the design of the former part of the motion, was accordingly prepared by one of a committee appointed for that purpose : though from the distance of the members of that committee from

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from one another (one of them residing in England) with other circumstances, prevented their having a meeting to deliberate upon it, previous to the next meeting of the General Synod, to which, overtures of a similar nature, in whole or in part, were presented from other quarters, to which also, the overture of the Provincial Synod of Edinburgh was, by agreement, transmitted. After conversation on the subject, the General Synod expressed a desire to take some step, if it were practicable, at that very meeting, for carrying these overtures into effect. The step taken by the Provincial Synod, was reported, and the Address, above-mentioned, was produced, and read. Without having entered into a particular judicial discussion or correction of it, the general tenor and contents of it, received approbation, so far as it went, and it was thought, that a publication of it by the Writer of it, or by a committee, though without synodical sanction, might be useful. Nothing however, was enacted: and the reverend Brother, who drew up that paper of advices, has hitherto seen meet to withhold it from the public; nor has any thing, to the same purpose, in name of the Synod, ever yet appeared, if we except a late act, cautioning their people on the head of certain reduplicating and ensnaring oaths.

It was observed, when the Address was under consideration, however well adapted it was to serious people in communion with the Secession, that the second part of the overture, that relates to the exhibition of the principles and vindication of the conduct of the Associate-body, especially in regard to some recent disputes, for the satisfaction of those who are without,

or

or who may be disposed to misrepresent them, was not so particularly attended to in it as seemed to be needful; it was therefore by the Synod recommended to the same committee, to prepare something more full and explicate upon that subject against the next meeting. It was in consequence of this appointment, that the following paper was written, and presented to the meeting, in April, 1798, by the original proposer of the motion. The same reasons, however, that had prevented the discussion of the former, in a committee previous to the meeting of Synod, prevented it also as to this. But to avoid, as much as possible, unnecessary delays, it was submitted to judgment in the state in which it then was, the same, as to any material alteration, with that in which it is here published, excepting some additions pointed out below †. It was admitted, as the other had been, to be read, in two different *Sederunts*, and the objection from the want of this desirable formality, though made, was over-ruled; — as the labours of committees, however helpful, are not essential, nor always conducive, to the dispatch of business in court.

Some account of the determinations of Synod upon this paper, and upon the whole of this interesting business, will be subjoined in the Appendix.

† The Additions, are the Explicatory Paragraph, beginning in P. 6; — the concluding Paragraphs of Part I. beginning near the Foot of P. 35; and the latter part of Part II. from P. 50 to the end. Though the conclusion was not transcribed, the writer was desirous to have the resolution of Court upon the substance of the Overture, the first opportunity, by which his conduct as to the sequel might be regulated.

C O N T E N T S.

Reasons for this Declaration. P. 1—4.

PART I. *The PRINCIPLES OF SECEDERS not inimical to government, or society.*

Reformers, and Dissenters from an established religion, liable to be charged with disaffection. p. 5.—
Seceders not Dissenters, either from the civil authority, or reformed religion of their country. p. 6. -- Christianity friendly to just government, order and peace. p. 7. -- The Protestant Reformation, adopted by Seceders, recognized the rights of princes against papal usurpation, and turbulent fanatics. p. 8.

Their principles as to obedience to the British government early and explicitly declared, and settled as a term of communion with them. p. 9.

Their principles on this subject not changed, and so not more dangerous than at first. p. 11.

Their leading principle as to lawful government, and the reason of obedience, adopted by all free nations, and maintained by the most eminent political writers. p. 13.

Civil government God's ordinance, though founded on principles natural and common to men. p. 14.

Different forms of it lawful, and affect not the duty of obedience. p. 15.

Seceders have vindicated the title and authority of kings; and acknowledged the comparative excellence of the civil constitution of Great Britain. p. 17.

The doctrines of compact, right of defence, resistance, &c. admitted by them, not new, nor peculiar to them. p. 18. -- Improved by them in argument only in favour of the British government, and duly limited. p. 20.

Subjection

Subjection to Rulers enjoined, notwithstanding defects, diversity of religion or apostacy. p. 22.—Not inconsistent, with a testimony against what is wrong, or prosecuting the design of reformation, p. 24.

A spirit of innovation and hasty change condemned. p. 27.

The right, and regular manner of public reformation. p. 27.

Enumeration and reprehension of all public sins, in church acts, not inconsistent with dutiful subordination, p. 28.

Ecclesiastical authority, and civil, may respect the same objects, yet in a manner entirely distinct. p. 31.

No reason for restraining the due freedom of Ecclesiastical courts, or Ministers. p. 33.

The calumnious charges of treason and sedition, brought against the principles and proceedings of our Covenanting ancestors, long since refuted. p. 35.

Acts of the Legislature implying these, expressly, or virtually annulled, by the revolution settlement and subsequent laws. p. 37.

PART II. *Of the late* CONDUCT OF SECEDERS.

General reflections on the public dissensions, and on the spirit, and measures relative to the late associations for reform. p. 40.

To the criminal principles and designs imputed to these societies Seceders total strangers. p. 42.

They had no particular activity in forming or promoting these societies. p. 42.

Their terms, object, and specific plan very different from those of the Secession. p. 45.

No peculiar advantage to the Secession cause, could have been expected from the parliamentary reform proposed, p. 46.—Nor from a change of monarchy into a republic, p. 47.—Much less from general anarchy, and the destruction of all government, p. 49.

The good that may eventually result from public convulsions, and calamities, to the church, no reason for promoting them, p. 49.

To seek the reform of public evils, is still the interest and duty of all. p. 51. In

All national reforms, whether merely political or ecclesiastico-political, in the general principle, right, and regular mode of promoting them, similar: No consistent Protestant could absolutely condemn either, without condemning both. p. 52.

Reform in Britain not necessarily connected with a destruction of its government, or the horrors of a French revolution. p. 57.

Sentiments and conduct of Seceders in reference to the French revolution and war. p. 58.—Alarms of plots. p. 63.—Royal fasts, promulgation of edicts on Sabbath. p. 64.—Counter associations and addresses. p. 65.—Public oaths and tests. p. 67. Clandestine societies. p. 70.—Schemes of philosophical reformers, and the political system of modern infidels. p. 72.

The flagrant corruptions of the old constitutions of Europe, made reform or destruction necessary and unavoidable. p. 75.

Best security against apprehended dangers of reform and revolution. p. 79.

The use to be made of revolutionary events and wars abroad. p. 81.

APPENDIX. p. 85.

ERRATA.

Pref. p. 4. l. 10. for *as* read *was*.

ib. 6. l. 9. for 1798, read 1795.

Declar. 1. l. 10. from the foot, for *hitherto* read *long*.

-- 3. from the foot, for *enjoining* read *enjoying*.

15. 7. after *or* insert *do*.

17. 20. for *as* read *so*.

30. 18. after *especially* insert *at*.

36. 1. after *well* add *as*.

— 19. for *notional* read *national*.

37. 2. from the foot, for *Secession*, read *Seceders*
in their.

53. 12. read *ecclesiastico-political*.

69. last line, read *aspiring*.

75. 9. for *approved* read *opposed*.

79. 28. insert the *to* before *such*.

— 9. for *add* read *and*.

DECLARATION.

SENSIBLE of the present critical and alarming state of affairs in these kingdoms, and knowing the situation in which the ministers and people associated in a state of secession from the established churches stand in reference to the ruling powers, and the greater body of the people therein, the General Associate Synod cannot but be impressed with the delicacy of the subject of the present declaration, which nothing but the pressure of necessity, and the vindication of themselves and their principles from aspersions, could have engaged them to make. Though a fair and open declaration of their principles is what they have never shunned, nor have any cause to be ashamed of at any time, yet to be obliged to offer any thing like an apology, or even explication of their sentiments and conduct in reference to the present civil government under which Providence hath placed them, or to address the public about matters which may appear connected with political disputes, and civil dissensions which at present divide the nation, is a necessity which they cannot but regret, as it imposes a task upon them rather new, and hitherto deemed unnecessary; and which, at such a time as this, when party-prejudices operate so strongly, and when jealousies are so much awake, must be attended with uncommon difficulty.

Desirous of bestowing their chief attention on the immediate objects and duties of their religious profession, and satisfying themselves with enjoining and exercising, in common with other subjects, their own freedom of judgment about all public occurrences, or disputes of

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another

another kind, at home or abroad, they were disposed, so far as regard to statinal and relative duties, and a keeping clear of other men's sins would permit, to observe silence in all ecclesiastical administrations as to these mournful differences and animosities, which for some time past have so greatly agitated men's minds, interrupted the internal as well as external peace of the country, and so much alienated people from the mutual confidence and affection, and those reciprocal duties they owe to each other in civil society. This part they would still have chosen: but the spirit of the times, the misrepresentations that are so common---the unbounded licence of accusation and calumny, together with the hasty credulity of many, will no longer permit them to use the same reserve and silence. Besides these disputes having gradually come to involve questions of the greatest magnitude to public weal---as they touch some general and leading principles relating to authority and obedience, as they seem at least indirectly to affect the subject of ecclesiastical reformation, and religious liberties as well as civil, as they are likely to produce the most extensive, serious and lasting consequences---even altho' the keenness with which they have been prosecuted had not rendered it almost impossible for any class of people to remain altogether neutral in regard to them, the nature of them is such as may seem to forbid such supineness.

When it is farther considered, how many declarations have for years past been emitted from public societies, and various classes of men of almost every description, religious as well as secular, their very silence is liable to misconstruction; more especially after the surmises and insinuations tending to render their loyalty and peaceableness suspected, which are to be found in a late publication, circulated with uncommon industry, and marks of public countenance, through all the land;---wherein it is affirmed, that the part some Dissenters both in England and Scotland have acted, has brought "an odium upon the dissenting interest, in the eyes of Government and its adherents, which will not be easily wiped off."---And "that at this time, there are not a few who consider Seceders, influenced by the peculiar principles of their society, as ringleaders of that party who avowedly set themselves to oppose the measures of Government,

to embarrass its motions, and to overturn it, if possible, from the foundation * ;"—while, at the same time, no due care is taken to vindicate them or their principles from such a reproach, except as to those of them who may peradventure coincide in their views with that writer on the several subjects of debate, or may consider dissenting and secession principles exactly in the same light with him.—Had this been done by a stranger to them, or one avowedly hostile to their cause, it might perhaps have been suffered to pass without particular animadversion : but when such a heavy charge comes thus to be retailed and circulated by *one of their own number*, the danger is greater of its making unfavourable impressions upon the public mind, and of meeting with a ready reception.

The charge indeed draws deep, were there any proper ground for it. If Seceders were indeed enemies to peace and good order in civil society; were they plotters against constituted governments, or seeking the total subversion of the British, under which they live;---were they failing in such a principal part of the duty of Christian men and citizens;---were they wantonly to discard or trample under foot, so many express and solemn injunctions on that head;---they might with good reason be considered as vain pretenders to reformation--as departing from the uniform testimony and laudable practice of the Christian church, nay, as men who had in reality denied the faith, and deserved to be ranked with infidels : Instead of meriting the character of witnesses for truth, they might rather be put into the class of the turbulent seducers, described in the apostolic page, who were "presumptuous, self-willed, and not afraid to speak evil of dignities." Instead of deserving countenance from the good, they would justly be liable to be punished by the civil sword, as well as to perish by the judgments of God, "in the gainsaying of Korah."

But before a charge of this import be brought or admitted against any body of men professing respect to the authority and interests of Jesus, Christ, justice requires that the evidence should be very clear, if not indubitable. Confident of the total want of any such evidence, that can be supposed to affect the Secession body; they might content themselves with a direct denial of the truth of the

* Essays on Government, &c. p. 3, 4.

the allegation, pronouncing it to be before God and men, a most malicious and atrocious calumny. But as they are not at present standing "at Cæsar's judgment-seat," after the manner of those who are obliged to answer only to the production of legal evidence to criminate them; without availing ourselves of such a summary defence, or seeking to evade the narrowest scrutiny of our principles and conduct on the subject in question, and without making use in this case of the common and easy expedient of expressing in a few general and ambiguous phrases, our loyalty and attachment to Government, and our abhorrence of all seditious practices, we decline not the trouble, of a closer investigation, of these particulars, which may seem to afford any colouring for such an imputation, and which may be looked upon by superficial observers, or rash and prejudiced partizans of the present day, as sufficient to condemn them. Nor do we want, from any selfish or political considerations, to conceal, that after the manner which has so often been declared by the oppressors and persecutors of the reformed church of Scotland, to be seditious, and which some may yet be pleased to reckon such, so have we adopted and maintained the testimony of Presbyterians---and so we continue "to worship the God of our fathers."

If any degree of disaffection to civil government regularly constituted, be imputable to the Associated body, it must either arise from the nature and tendency of their religious principles, or else from some part of their public conduct---some proceedings publicly countenanced or allowed among them of this import, though not flowing from or warranted by their principles, but implying a deviation from them. But whether the charge rest upon the one or the other of these grounds, we hope it will be no difficult matter to remove it.

PART FIRST.

First; AS TO THEIR PRINCIPLES. If this charge be brought against either the complex system of their principles, or those which have been commonly received among them more immediately relating to Government, it must proceed from one who is but little acquainted with them; or from those who on other accounts may be engaged in a state of opposition to them. From any of our own body it cannot with any consistency come;

as such would only hereby be bringing forward their own condemnation, or would act a similar part to treacherous Judas, by delivering up a cause which they themselves had espoused, and all who conscientiously adhere to it, as criminal, into the hands of chief priests and rulers.—It hath not come to our knowledge that any continuing in connexion with our society have acted such an inconsistent part as expressly to arraign their principles as guilty either of rebellion or sedition. The writer above referred to, however he may have mis-stated, or otherwise injured them, yet has not alledged that the principles themselves, which are still avowed as his own profession, are in fault, but the conduct of those who have adopted them, but in this respect violate them, should wholly bear the blame. But while ignorance of, or inattention to these principles so generally prevails, and while prejudice and misrepresentation of them on this head is become it seems with others not uncommon, a brief statement, or summary of the leading articles relating to this matter, may be needful, after we have made the few following general observations, accompanied with a short historical detail.

It is nothing new, and need not appear surprizing, that a religious profession while not generally adopted by a nation, or receiving countenance from the civil authority, especially when directed against many things in the system of religion legally settled, should expose those who maintain it, to the invidious reproach of disaffection or disobedience to that authority, however dutiful they may be in their disposition and whole conduct in reference to it. In such a case it becomes almost unavoidable; the artful, the spiteful, or interested enemies of that profession and of religious reformation, in order to prevent its progress, make use of that specious pretext, and traduce them to the people and their governors, as movers of sedition, and both the unthinking multitude, and jealous rulers, have been too ready to listen to the accusation: though the real cause of it may be the hatred men bear to religion and reformation, and not any principles of disloyalty, or seditious practices. Even our Lord, and his Apostles, were not exempted from the invidious charge.—The best of men, and the best of causes, have not escaped it:—Not the much commended primitive Christians;—not the famous Waldenses and Albigenes

Albigenses abroad; or the Wickliffites or Lollards in Britain before the Reformation: Not the Protestant reformers in any nation in Europe while struggling against the prevailing torrent of iniquity, and the adverse tide of power. And has not every act of violence and species of persecution always proceeded on this pretence.—What else produced that series of oppressive laws, and cruel treatment in England against those called Puritans? What but this gave birth and continuance to the unjust and barbarous laws under which Presbyterians in Scotland so long suffered?—Believe the religious adversaries of both, and they will loudly declare, that they procured all these to themselves by their disloyal principles, and seditious spirit or practices: while no dutifulness on their part could still the clamour, unless they had, along with the debt of civil obedience, and sacrifices for peace, also renounced their religion and a good conscience toward God. This consideration should teach all who wish to avoid the guilt of rashness and injustice, to be very wary of employing or entertaining such a topic of common-place scandal, especially in such a time as the present, when along with religious dissensions, the rancour of civil faction prevails to such a degree.

While we thus mention the native and common effect arising from diversity of religion in a nation, and suppose that something of this kind may be expected to follow upon the religious separation of Seceders from the National Church of Scotland, yet, whatever appearance of hostility to the ecclesiastical and legal constitution of that church, it may wear, or in whatever light it may be sometimes represented, it is not meant, as if they hereby had really afforded ground for charging them with adopting a religion different from the Reformed Church of Scotland, contained in her public standards, ratified often by her national vows, as well as sanctioned, in former times, by many public laws. The truth is, the profession of the church of Scotland, and the public laws by which it hath been authorized, have greatly varied, and in some instances been contradictory, at different times. It is from the late defection from the national religion, as above expressed, by the judicatories, or ruling majority of that church, that they have seceded: and it is against that

that contradiction in the professions, and the public laws, in reference to this matter, that they protest. They profess invariable adherence and relation to the true Presbyterian Church in Britain: they plead a preferable title to the genuine constitution and principles of that church, to that prevailing party who for a long time of late have laid claim to them, however the civil administration, and forms of law, may countenance that claim. The question, which of them are best founded in their pretensions, can only be determined by an impartial examination, and scrutiny into facts. While the Associate Body continue to make such a profession, they stand not on the footing of enemies to the reformed religion of their country, or even of dissenters from it. They are rather complainers upon the acts of violation of it, whether flowing from church or state:—they plead not for the abolishing of the national religion, and the introduction of a new, but for the reformation and greater stability of it. Much less can they be justly viewed, on account of such a separation, as inimical to the civil constitution or authority of laws, even in their co-operation with the National Church; still less in other matters of common good and utility.

Neither will it admit of a reasonable doubt, that where the Christian religion is best understood, and where the true principles of it have greatest influence, there all lawful authority will meet with the most conscientious respect, and the public peace be most effectually secured. These principles are so far from having any tendency to subvert, abolish, disturb, weaken, or unduly limit the rights and functions of civil government among any people, they very much strengthen and enforce, as well as improve it. It is essential indeed to that religion, that it reserves the power of legislation over consciences to God alone, and permits none to sin under pretence of obeying human authority, but makes it a rule to all, that the will of God made known, and his authority expressed in his word, is to be obeyed in all things, before and against any other authority whatsoever—a principle which is essential to all religion and morality, and which can operate only as a salutary check upon the lawless lusts of governors, that they abuse not their power to evil. In all besides it leaves persons and nations at full liberty to provide

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provide for their temporal and civil interests, to institute and conform themselves to such modes of policy, and observe such laws and customs as may be conducive to public good and order in society, and in nothing contrary to justice and religion. Hence the principal duties and rights both of rulers and subjects are clearly recognized in the doctrines and embodied in the laws of that religion: Christians, though called to the highest freedom in Christ, are not hereby set free from the common obligations of other men, but more strictly bound to civil subjection, peace, and obedience to laws, as well as every other duty. These are enjoined upon them "for the Lord's sake," and because it is the express will of God. Loyalty and peaceableness are made characteristic marks of godliness: *the fear of God*, and *the honour of kings*, are exhibited in the closest conjunction in the sacred volume.

Accordingly the Protestant Reformation, tho' principally concerned to restore true Christianity, and rectify the many abuses which the wicked policy of Rome had introduced into religion through several ages, did not overlook this important part of reform: it tended also to restore and secure the rights of princes, long violated, and to promote the welfare of particular kingdoms, and the liberty of mankind, by settling the authority of magistracy on just foundations. Among other things in controversy with their adversaries, the reformers with unanimity declared against papal encroachments on civil power; the confounding of jurisdictions; the exemption of certain classes of men from the laws; the subjection of subjects to a foreign head, claiming power to tax them, or absolve them from allegiance, at his pleasure; whereby they approved themselves better subjects and patriots, as well as Christians, than the slaves of Rome. They also, with one voice, declared against the wild and enthusiastic opinions of some persons pretending reformation, the levelling schemes of Anabaptists, and the tumultuous insurrections of the Boors in Germany, which were all invidiously charged by their adversaries upon the principles and cause of the Reformers, though they could derive no countenance from these but by their perversion and abuse. The opposition also managed to the Protestants by the civil powers under which they lived, in many places, afforded another occasion and call to them

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to assert and manifest to the world their loyal and peaceable subordination, in all points wherein obedience to human authority and laws could warrantably be claimed.— They accordingly took care, while asserting and exercising their natural or religious rights, and in explaining the due limits of authority and obedience, to avoid any thing that might look like a refusal to give due allegiance even to the rulers who were inimical to their religion, or as if they were men delighting in anarchy and *Belialism*.— Their public apologies and confessions, as well as private writings, contained assertions and language sufficiently explicit and strong upon these points; as may be seen, among other monuments, in the passages relating to them in the Augsburg, the Helvetian, the French, and Scottish Confessions. Their personal practice and public proceedings accorded with these professions, unless when open tyranny compelled them to use the common right of self-defence and resistance.

The Associate Body while they have endeavoured to draw their principles from the same divine source, so they have freely expressed their approbation of what is contained in these confessions on this subject, in the sense, and with the limitations, expressed in the “Declaration and defence of their principles, on the head of civil government, subjoined to the answers of the Associate Presbytery to Mr. Nairn.” Having thus declared their agreement with other Christian and Protestant churches in this part of their profession—they have never sought out any new and unbeaten tracts. They cannot be reputed followers of upstart theorists, nor the pupils of infidel philosophers; though they never supposed, that the principles of true philosophy and religion were at variance on this subject; nor did they ever judge it improper for men who are Christians to avail themselves of any light or aids that philosophy can furnish, or the lessons which experience may teach, in matters that fall properly within their province.

It is farther to be observed, as a circumstance favourable in this case to the Associate Body of Seceders, that the great object of their association, and the leading principles and terms of it, have long ago been ascertained and settled. Very soon after it was formed, when they

had deliberately declared their principles with regard to religious reformation, and were settling the particulars of their own ecclesiastical communion and discipline, an occasion arose which in a manner obliged them to explain themselves more fully than other churches have usually done, on the head of civil government and obedience in general, and as to the duty of people engaged in ecclesiastical reformation in reference to the corruptions of a body politic to which they may belong. This necessity arose not from any extrinsic attack upon them on the head of loyalty, but from one of their own number refusing to acquiesce in some part of their principles and decisions, as favouring too much the authority of the British government, and as virtually homologating its corruptions. The difference terminated in the expulsion of that minister, who disowned the authority, which they had resolved inviolably to acknowledge, from their communion, and in fixing a standing rule for the time to come, that none should be admitted into any office among them, but such as should be agreed with them in this matter. On this occasion, to vindicate their procedure, and for the information of the world at large, they published the *Declaration* and *Defence* above referred to. This was done, without any view or desire of meddling with politics, or pretending to frame new constitutions of government, but in prosecuting the line of their ecclesiastical duty;—without being moved thereto by the state of political parties, or questions, that were either subsisting at that time, or that may have since arisen; without any design of procuring state-favours on the one hand, and without being influenced by apprehensions or dangers from the actual government, on the other.

Whatever these principles therefore may be, they cannot be supposed to originate from any recent spirit of sedition said to prevail, or to have been adopted by Seceders for the purpose of opposing any late measures of Government or Administration, or promoting any late condemned plans and associations for political reform. If they have not changed them for such a purpose, those who continue to hold them may still do so, without being involved in such designs or connections; as those did who first stated, and formerly adhered to them,
without

without any thought or previous knowledge of those things.

If the principles of Seceders have not been altered, on this head, they must either be sustained as safe and innocent at this moment, or they must have been culpable and dangerous from the beginning. To say the latter, even setting aside the intrinsic evidence arising from them, would be to suppose that the whole British nation has been either very blind or very supine; and that the civil guardians of the public welfare have been very unfaithful to their trust, not only at the first public declaration of their principles, but for half a century back, while no law or state-proceeding has ever criminated them, or indicated so much as a suspicion of criminality. It would also imply the absurdity, that a system of seditious principles has avowedly been embraced, and practically maintained, by a numerous body of people, without any hurtful effect, and that a plot has been carrying on for so long a time without any real danger resulting from it.

The Secession in its rise and progress had a number of interested observers, and acute adversaries, who wanted not inclination to make a rigorous scrutiny into every opinion or step which might assume the appearance of a fault; and some of them, while they traduced them to the world, appear to have been sufficiently disposed, if matter could be found, to have lodged an accusation against the leaders of it before the ruling powers: and in the heat of party-disputes, insinuations of this kind were not spared: But unhappily for the success of any such attempt, at that time, the nation was then too warmly attached to the cause of British liberty, and the principles which had seated a race of Protestant princes on the throne, to lend a patient ear to such a charge against men so well known to be among their most zealous friends and advocates. At that period too, and for a long time after, ministers of the established church, especially those most distinguished for their talents and liberal knowledge, were generally so friendly to the principles of a free government asserted at the Revolution, and to the Protestant Succession, of which there are many undoubted proofs still remaining, seriously to differ with the principles professed by Seceders on that head, or to
give

give countenance to any such charge against them : So that these envenomed arrows shot against them were easily repelled, or fell of their own accord to the ground, without making any disadvantageous impression on the better part of the nation : nor did " the spirit of the rulers rise up " against them, to second the zeal of some violent clergymen : nor have they ever had cause, it is presumed, to repent this exercise of their political wisdom, justice, and moderation. As often as any since have recurred to this abandoned point of attack, or attempted to put in motion the formidable engine against them, instead of doing any execution, it has rather recoiled upon those who employed it. Indeed a few angry words, elaborate arguments, and strained consequences, flowing from disputants, can hardly be supposed to gain general credit, at least for any long time, with a discerning public, while experience and practical conduct, the best test of the tendency of any system of principles, uniformly plead in favour of the accused party, as it evidently did in the present case. Their loyal attachments, and their regular and peaceable behaviour, their very enemies might witness. In these they remained firm and immovable, amidst all the heats and confusions of religious division ; amidst all the changes of administration, and jarings of parties, in the state ;—amidst wars abroad, and broils, nay, an actual rebellion at home, in which not one individual of their number was found to be engaged, but for the suppression of which not a few of them voluntarily performed some active services, at the hazard, and some of them with the loss, of their lives, as well as the spoiling of their goods. All those ministers who first associated, and were immediately concerned in stating and defending these principles, together with the first generation of people who adhered to them, have now left the mortal stage, and generally, in no less estimation, among those who knew them, as peaceable subjects and cordial friends to the reigning family, than for godliness, and usefulness, in the church. The first heats have in a great measure subsided : and after a long interval of years, the temper of the nation and the liberality of the age, seemed to promise and ensure a cooler and more equitable judgment of their cause.

But

But when all were pleasing themselves with the thought, that this temper and state of things would have been permanent, the new animosities that have unhappily arisen, have again embroiled the scene, rankled the spirits of men, and with the other evils attendant on contention, have awaked many groundless jealousies, and revived many obsolete and illiberal prejudices.

But a short review of these principles, as proposed, will be sufficient to refute the charge; at least to such as are capable of judging with impartiality and candour. We shall here point out some of the leading sentiments, in regard of the ignorance that prevails with many about them, and as few are at due pains deliberately to consult the original papers.

The great leading principle, and the sum of the whole is, "That all in a nation, whatever differences may subsist in religion, or in other sentiments, are under indispensable obligation from the law of God, to conform to that form of civil government, and to obey these rulers that are appointed and continued by the will of the nation, or that are generally acknowledged by it, in all lawfull commands." And this general doctrine they have expressly applied to the British government. Such a lawful civil constitution, notwithstanding many things defective and blameable in it, and such an order of rulers, as are to be considered as moral powers, notwithstanding many instances of mal-administration, they declared at that time to be actually existing, and still suppose them to be continuing in Great-Britain; to which accordingly the scriptural injunctions to give honour, fear, subjection and tribute, are to be applied, and to which they consider themselves, in common with all other orders in the nation, to be in conscience bound. This practical obligation they avow not only in opposition to the pretensions of an exiled family, so long adhered to, but also in contradistinction to mere ideal forms of government, more perfect constitutions, or to any other set of rulers, which any party in the nation, might think preferable, while not really admitted or constituted in the manner above defined.

In the illustration and defence of these leading positions, it may be found that they have not employed any other

other doctrines or arguments than such as are contained in the law of nature, and divine revelation; and which have been reduced to practice by all enlightened and free nations: So that they can with no shadow of justice be charged with a fondness for innovation, either in religion or politics, or with adopting wild impracticable theories, or notions, tending to disturb the established order of society, the tranquillity of states—whereby kings may be dethroned, or wantonly resisted, and all government, the British in particular, subverted. Their views and reasonings will be found in the main, to be the same with the most approved writers, who have endeavoured to settle the authority of rulers, and the policy and peace of kingdoms, on their firmest basis; particularly those who have been long esteemed in Britain as the best and most successful defenders of the limited British monarchy, and the rights and liberties of the people. And by the concession of all who think reasonably on the subject, no system of government can ever be useful, or secure, in which power and right are not combined; and in which the reciprocal privileges and duties of rulers and people, are not duly balanced and established: Whoever seek to enlarge and exalt the rights of the one, to the subversion of the other, on whatever side they err, may justly be accounted the most dangerous incendiaries, and the greatest enemies of public good.

In particular, they have acknowledged, in the words of the old Scots Confession, “that empires, kingdoms, dominions and cities, are distincted and ordained by God; the power and authority in the same, be it of emperors in their empires, or kings in their realms, dukes and princes in their dominions, and of other magistrates in their cities, to be God’s holy ordinance; ordained for the manifestation of his own glory, and for the singular profit and commodity of mankind: So that whosoever goeth about to take away or confound the whole state of civil policies, now long established; we affirm the same men, not only to be enemies to mankind, but wickedly to fight against God’s expressed will.” They also confess with the Helvetians, “that *every kind* of magistracy is instituted by God for the peace and happiness of man. And all subjects should own the goodness of God in the institution

institution of a magistrate, by honouring him as the minister of God."—They also join the Protestants of France, who said, "We believe that God designed the world should be governed by laws and polity, and kept in order by this means: that he has therefore appointed kingdoms, commonwealths, and the other forms of government, whether they do or not descend by hereditary right."

When it is asserted, that civil policy and magistrates are ordained by God for all nations, it is not meant, either that the institution is founded in the revealed will of God contained in the scriptures, or that any of its particular forms, or the persons invested with authority, can claim any divine institution, either by the natural or revealed law of God, so as to possess a superior and exclusive right of obligation, independent of human will, and the right resulting from social compact. They admit the institution, in general, to be founded in the common principles and law of nature; while the particular forms, and the authority of the particular governors, are determined by the will, and continued, or altered, by the choice, or tacit consent, of the people, for whose benefit they are appointed

As the necessity of civil government is common to all people, so must also be the right of constituting it. No wickedness of a people can exempt them from the obligation, or deprive them of this right. By the dictates of right reason, and regard to common advantage, may all be directed and regulated in the exercise of this right; and though they may greatly abuse it, this is no reason for divesting them of it. In such cases their errors and the consequences of them will fall chiefly on themselves. Though some nations have their reason more improved, and some enjoy, by the special favour of God, in addition to natural discoveries, a supernatural revelation giving a clear and fuller discovery of common duties, as well as of the true religion, yet whether accompanied with or deprived of these superior advantages, the nature, and general ends, of civil government, and the right and duties of rulers and subjects, among all people, are essentially the same. Different modifications of them only arise from the diversified circumstances, customs,

toms, compacts, and regulations of particular nations. In the exercise of the same essential rights, and the prosecution of the necessary end, according to the principles and lights afforded men, all the various modes of civil society, the very different constitutions of government, in different nations, or in the same nation successively, at different times, whatever degrees of excellency may belong to them, or to the individual persons entrusted with the functions thereof, so far as they are calculated, in some competent measure, to gain the end, and while they are voluntarily appointed or submitted to by the body politic, they are all equally obligatory, and may all be said to be ordained by the authority of God. As such obedience is due to any of them, when not requiring any thing beyond the limits of duty. In such cases, "the ordinance of man," coincides with "the ordinance of God," and is the ordinary medium and rule for discovering it to all the individuals of a community—and whatever is agreeable to the natural law, or right reason, which derives its origin from God, and is expressly sanctioned in his written law, it may with certainty be said to be the will of God.

According to these principles, they must necessarily consider it as absurd to confine the epithets of *lawful* or *regular* government, to one or other of the particular forms under which it may be settled by the discretionary will of particular nations, when speaking of lawful government in the abstract: for it is not to be supposed, that what is essential to the preservation of men, to the dispensing of justice, and the maintenance of common order and peace in society, can be so restricted either of right or in fact. They have been and may be found, in some degree, under the several forms. Yet the establishment of a form of government in a particular nation, may be a sufficient reason for accounting it, exclusively, while approved by a people, the lawful and regular government of that nation.—But the right of one nation cannot preclude the equal right of other nations in that respect. By the above principles, the authority of all principalities, the safety of all states, as well as the interests of all people, are fixed on the broadest base, whether they be Jewish or Pagan, Christian or Infidel, Popish

or

or Protestant, Regal or Republican. They have no tendency to break, or relax, the bond of obedience to constituted governors in any land, whether they be better or worse: nor can they excite discontents with that particular government under which people live, or warrant disorderly attempts to change it, whether it be more or less convenient, more or less free, more or less favourable to religious reformation. So it is expressly declared, "that as the different forms of civil government agree in their general nature, and as none of them has any institution exclusive of others, so the general rule of duty towards the supreme legislative power under any of these forms, answers as well under them all *."

But tho' they are far from the extravagance of those who think that all authority was annexed to the title, or is resident in the persons of kings—though they suppose the same supremacy of power, good government, and order, with rights internal and external equally sacred, may belong to republics as well as to monarchies; yet they are as far from encouraging any hatred to the office, or contempt of the persons or title of kings, that they have in express terms vindicated these from the insult of such as hold them as a curse to a people. Speaking of the Jewish government, they say, "though the body politic did sin very grievously, in the manner, time and circumstances of desiring that their government should be changed into a monarchical form—and though they were condemned for not consulting the Lord in making choice of their kings, (Hof. viii. 4.)—yet it would be dreadful to infer from these passages, that kingly government itself, in the form and authority thereof, was condemned, or inflicted as a judgment:"—for different reasons there assigned.

Of the mixed form of the British constitution, as settled in a King, temporal Lords, and Commons, and of the character and administration of the princes of the reigning family, they have on various occasions spoken in terms of high approbation. On occasion of the accession of his present Majesty, on the 16th of April,

* Declaration and Defence, &c. in Mr. Gib's Display of Secession-Testimony, v. i. p. 194.

1761, they express themselves thus :—‘ The synod do hereby agree in declaring, that they can yield to none of their fellow-subjects in prizing the civil government under which they live, as the best modelled government throughout the known world ; in respect to the memory of our late sovereign King George II. as one of the best of kings, of the mildest administration, who ruled over us as the common father of his people ; in thankfulness for the peaceable accession of our present sovereign King George III. to the throne of these kingdoms, in a firm resolution to support and live dutifully under his government, in our several stations and capacities, according to the word of God, and our received and known principles founded thereon, to which we are bound by solemn covenant ; in an inviolable attachment to the Protestant succession, in the illustrious family of Hanover ; and in a full purpose still to maintain these principles among the people under their inspection.’

But whoever attempts a particular explanation of the principles of government, whether the extent and rights of authority be chiefly insisted on, or the inherent power, and reserved privileges of the people, according to the purpose he may be pursuing, can hardly avoid employing some expressions, or assuming some positions, which may afford specious matter for cavil or misrepresentation, to such as are disposed to wire-draw and torture them : and when detached from the other parts, and the tenor of the discourse, they may appear with a suspicious or censurable air : at one time perhaps they will seem to confer excessive prerogatives or absolute power on rulers ; at another they will cause alarm as favouring the cause of anarchy, and popular licentiousness.—So it fared with the doctrine of philosophers and divines in past time : So it has happened to every noted system, or treatise on free government, previous to this æra. No wonder though there may be assertions of this kind found interspersed through the writings referred to ;—sentences which taken separately, and in an unqualified sense, may be pressed into the service of licentious demagogues.—Some of the doctrines they have taken for granted, and applied in the course of argument, in prosecution of their

[19]

their main design, have indeed been keenly disputed, and treated as the most odious and dangerous hypotheses by a numerous tribe of men : Of this kind are—the radical power and inherent right of the people at large to establish, limit, or alter their government and governors ; —the idea of a compact, tacit or express, between rulers and subjects, in order to a legal government ; —the right of every man to judge of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of every command by human authority ; —the right of self defence against the power of tyrants, and of deposing those who tyrannically abuse their power, by the general voice of a nation ; —the right of individuals or a minor part of a nation to testify against public corruption, and to use means to have a government reformed, and of a major part or body politic to settle a deed of constitution suitable to their circumstances, civil or religious—and to oblige every one admitted to the exercise of authority to conform unto it. But these are not the peculiar tenets of any religious party in this land. Nor are they peculiar to any nation, but have been known wherever a rational system of liberty has prevailed. — They were familiar to the ears and minds of the inhabitants of Britain : There could be no just ground of offence in Seceders appealing to principles, not only reasonable in themselves, but also generally admitted ; especially after some of them that may appear most obnoxious, had been more than once sanctioned by the practice and public authority of the nation, established in the constitution, and involved in the validity of the title of the reigning family to the throne ; and as Seceders did not first introduce, so neither can it be pretended that they carried these doctrines to an undue extent or dangerous extreme, or that they applied them to any unwarrantable purpose. Some of these, as the doctrine of resistance, and deposition of governors, which may be reckoned unsafe when unwarily taught to the people, it is evident, they have mentioned, not with the remotest view to a practical application of them to the legal government, for a century past established in Great-Britain, or to the present circumstances of the people, to which they are declared to be totally inapplicable ; but in order to shew that such natural and speculative rights were

no way inconsistent with the peaceable and conscientious subjection pled for, nor with the dutiful manner in which the Seceding Church had determined to maintain its religious testimony, and to prosecute a desired reformation.

In general, where any thing of this kind is introduced, it will be found accompanied with such limitations and cautions, and so guarded, as that none but such as seek occasion, can be in danger of mistaking what is said, or of deriving any countenance from thence to dangerous attempts, either on religious or civil accounts. Thus, while they declare, that tyrants and mere usurpers have no right to obedience, and that when the administration of any government degenerates into habitual tyranny, or when princes refuse to fulfil their obligations, then they may be set aside, or their authority disowned: they add, ' In order to render one a habitual tyrant, it is at least, ' necessary, that he leave ruling by just laws; and that ' he be engaged in war against the lives, or invading and ' and overthrowing the avowed liberties and privileges ' of the nation, civil and religious; or all of these; as ' was the case in persecuting times before the Revolution:—However quietly and orderly one may be ' obliged to live under mere usurpers or habitual tyrants, ' yet there should be no acknowledgment of their authority as binding upon conscience: But if any should ' have the face to alledge, that our present rulers do any ' way deserve these characters, it is quite needless to reason with them (a).'

While they teach, that the principle of subjection, as taught in scripture and admitted by them, is not ' at all ' inconsistent with any self-defence that is necessary, lawful and expedient, according to the word of God, and ' right reason, such as our worthy ancestors endeavoured ' at Pentland and Bothwell;—Yea, that there is no ' manner of inconsistency, between a posture of self-defence against particular injuries offered by a magistrate, ' and an owning, at the same time, his title and authority in what lawful commands he may impose;—They have also maintained, ' that the powers which they ' (our suffering ancestors) rejected, did differ, not only ' as

[21]
‘ as to their administration, but as to their office and
‘ kind, from any we have now ado with ;’—and that they
‘ were in a quite different situation from any in this pe-
‘ riod. Not only as they were tyrannically imposed up-
‘ on, to give express acknowledgment of the then autho-
‘ rity ; but as they were actually cast out from under
‘ the wings of all government, denied all benefit of law,
‘ and devoted unto destruction :---So that they by no
‘ means proceeded ultroneously in their rejecting the ci-
‘ vil government (b).’——They declare also, that the
state of their testimony, in rejecting the civil govern-
ment, was entirely different from what some were tak-
ing up, on a religious account : as they ‘ owned that
they neither did, nor could reject the magistrate, merely
for differing from them in religion.’

The only use to which they have applied these doc-
trines is, the laudable one of enforcing the duty of all,
and of religious dissenters in particular, to continue sted-
fast in their loyalty to civil rulers, not only when they
are of a different religion, but even may be using them
injuriously, on account of their profession, by shewing,
that such difference or ill usage, so far from warranting
them in flying to the extreme and extraordinary mean of
resistance, cannot even be a just ground for with-hold-
ing honour and subjection for conscience-sake. The
great scope of the reasonings, in the tract expressly writ-
ten on this subject, tends to this point. Thus, in ex-
plaining the precept of Solomon ; “ If the spirit of the
ruler rise against thee, leave not thy place, for yielding
pacifieth great offences ;” they say, ‘ Upon supposition
‘ of a ruler’s being so corrupt, as, without just ground, to
‘ discountenance, discourage or distress the subject, upon
‘ personal or religious accounts, the subject must not, in
‘ the mean time, repay him evil for evil : but while he
‘ is bound to use lawful endeavours, as his calling gives
‘ access, for self-preservation, for vindicating his inno-
‘ cency and the cause for which he suffers, and for hav-
‘ ing the government reformed ; he must, at the same
‘ time, continue in subjection and obedience to the ruler
‘ in lawful matters, while the civil state continues to
‘ acknowledge him.” And farther, ‘ When the spirit
‘ of

(b) Display, p. 290, 34r.

' of the ruler riseth up unjustly against the subject, cor-
 ' rupt nature is ready to manage a selfish opposition, in-
 ' retaliating the ruler, by transgressing also the rule of
 ' duty toward him--but this yielding pacifieth great of-
 ' fences--as the subject's standing to his duty, is both an
 ' habile mean for convincing the ruler of his error, and
 ' for extinguishing the offence he has taken--and for
 ' preventing farther evils and extremes which both the
 ' ruler and the subject may afterwards be driven to, if
 ' once the subject leave his place: for the beginning of
 ' strife is as when one letteth out water; therefore (saith
 ' the Lord) leave off contention, before it be meddled
 ' with (c).

Whatever rights they ascribe to a people over their
 magistrates, or in constituting, altering, or reforming
 their civil constitution, they expressly limit to the peo-
 ple collectively, or the body politic. 'Superiority,' they
 say, 'must in the order of nature be before subjection,
 ' the king before the subjects; but the body politic is in
 ' the order of nature before the king, giving rise to the
 ' king, and so cannot be subject to the king. The po-
 ' litic body is a party voluntarily contracting with the
 ' king; and their continued concern with him is anent
 ' the observation of a contract, not anent the yielding of
 ' subjection.——It is a principle inseparable from the
 ' true doctrine of liberty, that upon a king's not fulfil-
 ' ling his obligation, and refusing to be reformed, the
 ' people collectively considered, or as a body politic, are
 ' warranted to lay him aside.' At the same time they have
 entered this caveat; 'That no argument concerning
 ' the obligations or rights of the people collectively con-
 ' sidered, as a body politic, touches the question anent
 ' the duties or rights of the people separately considered
 ' as subjects, and that no inference can be drawn from
 ' the one to the other (d).'

Again, while they maintain that it is desirable, and
 the duty of all people to take care that the magistrates
 admitted to rule over them be good, both in a moral and
 religious view; while they allow, that a due measure of
 scriptural qualifications are necessary to the well-being,
 or

(c) Display, p. 298, 299.

(d) Ibid. p. 275.

or better discharge of the office, yet they plead and have largely proved, that these are not absolutely necessary to the being of the office. Consequently that the duty of subjection is not made to depend on their personal characters, or on the measure of religious qualifications which they possess or want, while they are put in lawful possession of ruling power, and continue to use it with the common consent, and are possessed of such ordinary capacity and qualifications as every society of reasonable men will consider as indispensibly needful, and which may serve to gain in any competent degree the ends of government. Hence they affirm, that the kings of the Heathen nations of old, were as really moral powers to whom obedience was due, as the kings in Judah were;—that the Jewish people were not condemned for yielding obedience in matters lawful to the worst of these kings that reigned over them, whether in their own land or elsewhere (e); and that the doctrine of the Apostle to the Romans, ch. xiii. 1—7. enjoined civil subjection in its full latitude, and all its parts, upon the Christians then at Rome, toward the rulers then in the Roman empire, but in such a way as still left full room for disapproving every thing evil cleaving to the laws or the persons of these rulers (f). According to them, the Apostle there speaks of rulers as such, abstracting from every other view of them, either good or bad: for every thing he says of them was truly and only verified in their civil office and administration. ‘He says not a word of their personal characters or qualifications, moral or religious; tho’ undoubtedly there was, at least, much evil about them in this respect;—he takes no manner of notice of their mal-administrations, either in a way of omission or commission: though yet it was certain that there never were nor could be any magistrates, either wholly or near wholly free of these: He speaks of them altogether as rulers; or as in the lawful possession of ruling power, and in so far as truly exercising the same.—Though there were many things different, odious and opposite to be seen about them; yet he does not pursue his present consideration of them any farther, than as they were truly wearing, and found

(e) Display, p. 328.

(f) Ibid. 329.

‘ found walking within the proper compass and limits of magistracy. Their practice did not always answer these things; their actual attendance thereunto was far from being continual; but their civil power, so far as truly exercised, was altogether confined thereunto.’ At the same time it is added, ‘ that the manner of the Apostle’s argument was calculated for discovering unto the Romans, the whole cases wherein they had any concern with magistrates by way of subjection; namely, in so far only as they answer the characters here given; and it was farther calculated, for cautioning the Romans against carrying subjection the length of any sinful compliance with them; whatever personal evils they were chargeable with, whether in their private character or conduct, or in their mal-administrations—all these they were to oppose, contend and testify against, according to their callings, knowledge, and access (g).’ And all this, the Associate Body affirmed with respect to the present Civil Government.

As to the difference in point of religion, and the want of certain religious qualifications, either through the defect or apostacy of such rulers, or the neglect and defection of the people constituting them, care is taken to instruct the minds of people, that these must not be allowed to mingle in the question about any civil relations, or interfere with the duty of allegiance. ‘ Though they hold, that rulers and people are equally bound to profess, and, in their stations, to maintain and promote the true religion revealed in the word of God; and that it is desirable, in the language of the former laws of Scotland, ‘ that prince and people be of one perfect religion;’ yet they also adopt the doctrine of the National Confession, that ‘ Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrate’s just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to him; from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted (h).’—And while it is acknowledged, ‘ there are in scripture several promises of good, reformed, reforming magistrates, and of deliverance to the Lord’s people from any grievance they presently ly under, in the want thereof—yet

(g) Display, p. 314, 315. (h) Conf. ch. 23. 4.

yet these promises can never belong to the rule of duty. A promise of the greatest future good, can be no warrant for spurning at the least present good: yea, the cherishing any good which is presently bestowed, is the ready way of attaining all the good that is promised.--- Wherefore no promise anent magistrates to come, can possibly interfere with the duty of subjecting to any thing lawful in the administration of magistrates that presently are (i). Though they believe, 'that it is peculiarly incumbent upon every civil state, whereinto Christianity is introduced, to study and bring to pass, that civil government among them, in all the appurtenances of its constitution and administration, run in an agreeableness to the word of God; be subservient unto the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ, and to the interests of the true religion and reformation of the church; without which they cannot truly prosper in their civil concerns, nor be enriched by the blessings of the gospel; Yet they are careful to warn their people against confounding the civil constitution with such a religious form or reformation of it; and as civil authority is essentially the same, before and after the introduction of such a reform, therefore the validity of it, or the proper grounds of civil obedience, cannot be affected by this difference; nor by any changes or apostacy in respect of such a reformation, can they be invalidated or abolished. While they approve of public oaths and covenants, entered into by all ranks of men in Britain, in order to promote and maintain reformation in religion and manners;---while they farther acknowledge, 'that the profession, defence 'and maintenance of the true religion, in doctrine, worship, discipline and Presbyterial church government, 'agreeable unto and founded on the word of God, was 'secured by the fundamental constitution of the civil 'government, in our reforming periods; which deed of 'constitution, in all moral respects, is morally unalterable, because of its agreeableness to the Divine will revealed in the word, and because it was attained to and 'fixed in pursuance of our Solemn Covenants: Yet they 'at the same time, maintain it as a principle, founded

(i) Display, p. 314.

' in the word of God, and agreeable to the Confessions
 ' of all the Reformed Churches, that as the defection of
 ' a nation from attained-to reformation doth not deprive
 ' them of a right to choose civil magistrates for them-
 ' selves, and that as subjection to them and obedience
 ' to their lawful commands, continues a duty incumbent
 ' upon the minority who adhere to the covenanted refor-
 ' mation; so also, that these civil rights of the nation
 ' and their magistrates, did neither arise from, nor were
 ' innovated by the reformation once attained to. True
 ' religion is not only the church's blessing, but her very
 ' substance; so that true religion and a true church can-
 ' not be divided. Now, if true religion became a part
 ' of the civil constitution, it inevitably follows, that the
 ' church becomes a part of the state: which doctrine, as
 ' it is absurd in itself, so it lays a plain foundation for
 ' Erastianism; overturning the distinction betwixt the
 ' kingdom of our Lord Jesus, and the kingdoms of this
 ' world. Moreover, if the true religion (which is spi-
 ' ritual and supernatural) became a part of the civil con-
 ' stitution; then it could no longer remain a civil, but
 ' became a religious, a spiritual, a supernatural consti-
 ' tution.'—Again, ' No human laws can alter the true
 ' distinction of the state from the church, or the true
 ' nature of magistracy, as established by the eternal and
 ' unalterable law of God (k).'

Though the Associate Body have all along deeply re-
 gretted and condemned the national apostacy from the
 foresaid Reformation, and have enumerated a variety of
 instances and gradations of it, both in respect of the civil
 and ecclesiastic authority, as well as the great body of
 people in the nation, which, as relating to the object of
 religion and deeply affecting its interests, they consider
 as entering with propriety into the matter of a religious
 testimony, and into confessions of sins and engagements
 to duty, by whomsoever the guilt of defection was con-
 tracted, or is still continued; though they hold them-
 selves, and all others, in whatever station they act, under
 a moral and unalterable obligation to abstain from active
 support or approbation of any of these sinful acts or cor-
 ruptions which involve the guilt of that apostacy, and
 also

(k) Display, p. 274, 275.

also as in conscience bound to seek, in a dutiful and peaceable manner the removal of obstructions in the way of a like reformation, and by all methods competent, to plead for and promote it; yet all this they view as consistent with maintaining the proper rights of rulers inviolate; with preserving the form, stability and integrity of the mere civil constitution; the distinct ranks, orders, and callings, with the due peace and subordinations of society; without allowing either of violent methods of reformation, new principles or modes of civil polity, or letting loose the dangerous spirit of turbulent fanaticism, or the lust and rage of boundless change. They know that the due performance of one duty is never incompatible with, nor weakens the obligation to any other. They enjoin every one to confine himself to this place, and proper calling, in endeavouring religious reformation, and to employ only the means which religion allows. They never insinuated, that it was the business of private people individually, or of the minor part of a nation, to encroach on legislative authority, to dictate laws, or to alter and reform the civil constitution; and that it is least of all the part of a religious body, or ecclesiastical courts, however distinct in their religious capacity, to separate themselves from the common authority and unity of the common-wealth in civil matters, or to prescribe forms of polity, or to change established laws.

Where a constitution is once established, and a regular government exercised, even a nation collectively are not warranted on slight grounds or smaller injuries, to exercise the power of alteration. Even where there may be great evils in a constitution, and the highest reasons for reform or revolution, yet all are warned of the danger of hasty change, and of removing or destroying what is good, along with the abuses to be rectified. While they have inculcated the admonition of Solomon, "to fear the Lord and the king," they have not forgotten the warning subjoined, *Meddle not with them that are given to change*; which supposes, 'that there will readily be some
' men given to change; men of a restless spirit, of a
' double mind, and of an unstable conduct; men ad-
' dicted to novelties; and who particularly will depart
' out of the old road of duty toward civil superiors, upon
' new

new pretences; while, at the same time, it is here implied, that even the children of God are in danger of meddling with such persons, and have special need to be on their guard against them (l).'

As to any change in the civil constitution, or existing laws, in those particulars wherein they declare a reformation to be needful, none can say, that they have ever dictated to the legislature, or attempted to controul the will of those in power, having never so much as presented a petition to them on the subject. While they know, that no acts or proceedings of theirs, as a church, representatively or collectively, can or ought to have any influence, directly and formally, in altering political laws, or directing civil management, they have contented themselves with pointing out the duty in general, and the regular manner in which it may, through the help of God, be effected: 'First, they say, the whole people, adjoining themselves to the true church, should approve themselves to be true members thereof; by serious, several and mutual endeavours to promote the true religion and reformation of the church, privately, publicly, universally, in their several places and callings. Secondly, this people, considered in their conjunct and politic capacity (as thus only the matter is competent to them) should by their deed of civil constitution, provide, that their magistrates be obliged to concur in the same true religion and reformation; and to rule them by laws no way prejudicial, but serviceable thereunto: As, moreover, they ought to obey, encourage and support their magistrates in that way; and effectually to endeavour their information and reformation, where deficient or corrupt (m).'

If any should object, that they have taken unwarrantable freedoms in condemning many supposed evils in the constitution, and in state acts and proceedings, of which a particular and long enumeration is made in the Judicial Testimony, the Acknowledgment of Sins, and other papers, the principal of which are also recapitulated and engrossed in the Defence of the Authority of the British Government. If it should be insinuated, that this has a tendency to alienate the minds of people from it, and from

(l) Display, p. 297.

(m) Ibid, p. 280.

from their governors, to bring contempt and odium upon them, to weaken the principle of subjection and reverence among the lower ranks, and to prompt them to irregular and seditious attempts to reform ;—the objection would be groundless, if not impious. If these evils really exist ; if they be chargeable upon a Christian nation before God, and expose all classes of men in it to the severest judgments, it must be a needful duty, and a public service, to have them pointed out : How else could they be removed, and the nation preserved ? The most salutary designs, and the most dutiful attempts, may some times have a contrary operation to what might be expected, and effects may incidentally arise from them to which they have no tendency. The enumeration of public as well as private corruptions, such as that referred to, for the purpose and in the manner in which it is done, can be no evidence of disrespect to lawful authority, or to the persons and dignity of rulers, nor can it justly render them odious or contemptible. It is iniquity persisted in that brings odium and dishonour : sin unrepented of becomes the reproach of any person or people ; not the declaration or censure of it ; much less serious humiliation and repentance for it before the Lord. Before him, and his impartial law, none may claim privilege, but all are on a level. It was no presumption in Daniel to specify to the monarch of Babylon some of his heinous sins, as well as of his predecessors, and to reprove the pride, obduracy, idolatry, sacrilege, and other vices reigning in the palace and among his nobles, or to read out in plain terms the writing of judgment on that account : nor did he surely mean to disparage the majesty of Nebuchadnezzar the great, or the peace of his kingdom, when he tendered him his counsel, when an awful doom was pronounced from heaven against him : “ Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity *.” When the prophets cried against the altar, the high places of Bethel, and called men from the worship of the golden calves, which a wicked policy had set up, and continued ; when they pointed

* Chap. iv. 27.

pointed out the guilt and dangerous consequences of "the statutes of Omri that were kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab," were they enemies to royalty, or the public weal of Israel? King Ahab said to Elijah, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?—Art thou he that troublest Israel?" But he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim †."

The ministers and people of the Secession, when associating for religious reformation, conformed to the approved example of the church of God in every period, when they traced down the remarkable steps of public defection, and confessed the evils in respect of which they and the nation were called to return. Such an enumeration or confession is in vain attempted, if it be not free and impartial. These made in the reforming times in Judah, especially the remarkable restoration of the ruinous temple, mention very explicitly the trespasss of their kings, princes, priests, and rulers: Particularly, there are striking precedents of this in the church of Scotland in her best times, and by the most faithful men therein. But this is never done with a view to degrade authority, or the higher orders of society, in the eyes of inferior people, or to humiliate one class of men by fixing blame upon them, exclusive of others; but that a sense of common guilt and danger may be produced in all: not that one may glory over or upbraid others, as the Pharisee did in the temple; but that all may be brought to contrition in the sight of God, and give glory unto him. If a share of blame lie upon rulers, as to the public deformation, this is not charged on them in contradistinction to the great body of the people: all of them in their stations, from the least to the greatest, being, in one shape or other, involved in the trespasss; and those who draw up the indictment willingly become the first examples of taking shame to themselves. To impress men with a fear of God, and a sense and detestation of sin, to awaken the sentiments and movements of true repentance, and make them jointly acknowledge their allegiance to the Most High; to remove every "accursed thing,

† 1 Kings xviii. 17, 18.

thing, that troubles the camp of Israel,"—is not the way to awaken animosities, or produce alienation from one another. This carefulness, this holy indignation, and zeal, this revenge, when most fervently excited, tend to the firmest union, and the most cordial love. Such was the tendency of the reprehensions and calls to repentance addressed to all classes of men by John Baptist, when the axe was laid to the root of the tree: "He shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, lest," said Jehovah, "I come and smite the earth with a curse *."

If any shall still insist, and say, that such a free discussion of public affairs in church and state, such censure of some things in political constitutions, the system of laws, or in the conduct and administration of those who fill the several offices of civil society, with whatever view it be done, is to depart from the line of ecclesiastical duty, and the proper business of men or of a society devoted to religion;—to what hath been already observed for obviating this, we may add, that the office of teaching and applying the laws of God in all the latitude of them, and to all persons, to explain the qualifications, and enforce the several duties, which true religion, and the better regulation and happiness of society may require, in persons who occupy the several relations and offices of life, public as well as private, civil as well as religious, and to condemn in them whatever the moral law and the word of God condemn, and to inculcate universal reformation—undoubtedly belongs to the church of Christ, and its ministers, while the power of making and executing human laws and constituting civil policies, belong wholly to others. As the laws of God and our Redeemer have authority over all classes of men and in all sorts of acts, be they natural, civil or religious, so the religious power of giving effect to these laws, and of using moral and spiritual means for rectifying abuses against them, in reference to all sorts of persons and in all kinds of acts, may be claimed and exercised by religious societies, or their officers, without confounding the due distinction of powers, or duties, and without encroachment upon civil rights.—Whatever the objects
may

* Mat. iii.

may be about which their power may be employed, whether political, commercial, military, or any other, it cannot on that account be called political, &c. though it be objectively so, while only employed about them in a religious manner, and for a spiritual end. As the civil authority claims, and exercises a right of determining in some cases relating to religious societies, and enacts laws for their protection, restraint, good order, external revenues, and the like, without ceasing, on that account, to be properly and wholly civil: with equal reason the ecclesiastical may be allowed to have a like latitude, objectively considered, without any incroachment or interference. The exercise of both about the same things, in a manner distinct and peculiar, doth not necessarily imply any contrariety of claims, or competition of jurisdiction. And where there may be danger of interference and encroachment, two societies in their nature distinct and independent, must be on an equality, as to the power of ascertaining their own constitution, of judging the nature, object, and extent of their own powers, and in the right of maintaining them, each in their own manner, against extrinsic restraints and undue invasion; otherwise the one would be rendered dependent upon the other. The rule by which to determine their own powers, and the limits of their jurisdiction, must be the original charter of their institution.

We may further say, though civil and ecclesiastical society, and the offices belonging to each, ought never to be confounded, and though the advantages resulting from revealed religion be not essential to civil polity, yet none who are acquainted with it, can doubt but that its wholesome doctrines and salutary influence should have a free course, as among all nations, so also among all ranks of men;—that they should distribute their streams thro' all the various channels of human relations and duties? As this is entirely consistent with the nature of religion, and the design of its author—correspondent to the institutions and examples of the New Testament, and the predictions of the Old, so it must ever prove highly conducive to the benefit and melioration of all these departments of society, as well as individuals. Nothing so effectual to banish all that is noxious and pernicious;—

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to check rising crimes, and combat and repel daring iniquity: nothing so fit to ensure fidelity, justice, obedience, and good order, or to cherish every good principle, and whatever is lovely and desirable among men. Thus the waters of the sanctuary, in the prophetic vision, go forth toward the dead sea, and hereby its waters are healed, and the vales and banks, wherever they flow, become beautiful and fruitful. In all directions, and in all seasons, without interruption, "the living waters from Jerusalem," it is said, "shall go forth, part of them toward the former sea, and part of them toward the hinder sea, in summer and in winter shall it be."

Let us search the whole scripture, and see, if the sins of wicked princes, corrupt governments, and privileged orders, were at any time spared in divine administrations: Or when was public repentance and reformation preached, or attained, while these flourished uncontrouled? What sort of evils are these against which the divine messengers did usually lift up their voice?—Were not many of them such as would be deemed, in modern stile, political or civil affairs?—the arrogance and impiety of princes, unjust leagues and wars, acts of corrupt judges, the wickedness of established priesthood; unrighteous decrees, oppression, deceit, breach of covenants, perjury, bribery, riot, luxury, covetousness, frauds, and dishonest gains, contemning and enslaving the poor;—and all the crimes that lay waste society, as well as violate the laws of religion. Did the faithful reprovers or reformers mistake their duty, and exceed their line, when they meddled with such matters? Our Lord assumed no civil authority when on earth, but made himself a servant of rulers; Did he then transgress in his reprehension of scribes, priests, and princes? Did he encroach on the rights of the high priest and Roman governor, when he challenged and reprimanded them for their base and unjust apprehension of him, and of the illegal treatment he met with in his trial and judgment? Did he fail in due respect, or invite to insurrection, when he told his judge, that both he and those who delivered him into his hands were guilty of a heinous sin? No: he never did violence, nor was any fault found in his lips. Did the Apostle of the circumcision afterwards mis-

take the limits of his commission, or seditiously arraign the legal authority and decisions of his nation, when he told the people, with their rulers, that "they had been the betrayers and murderers of the Holy One and the Just?" Or when he applied part of the second Psalm to the wicked convention of Herod, Pilate, and the rulers? Or when he refused to submit to the sentence of suspension from his office intimated to him by the Jewish council? Or when he invoked the divine power in opposition to their threats, "that with all boldness," notwithstanding these, "they might speak the divine word?"—Once more, was Paul acting unsuitably to his spiritual character, or that of a dutiful citizen, when he brings forth in an epistle, and enters on record to posterity, such a heavy charge as this against the proceedings of his nation?—"Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary unto all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost †."

Therefore, why should the princes and judges of the earth usually appear so jealous of encroachments on their prerogatives, by the free exercise of the functions he hath appointed in his kingdom, which is not of this world? Why should any wish to muzzle the mouths of ministers, or to restrain the freedom of spiritual courts, whose aim is only to suppress iniquity, and reform the hearts and manners of men? Why do the wicked Amaziah's, that haunt the court of princes, infuse jealousies into their mind, and procure orders to banish liberty of prophesying, from the vicinity of the king's courts and chapels? Why should the Herods of the earth wax wroth, and imprison and behead faithful reprovers? Why should corrupt sanhedrims so abuse their power, and forget their interest, as to sit in council together, "plotting against the Lord and his anointed?"—and charge the messengers of the Prince of Peace so sternly and so straitly, "not to speak any more in that name?" *They know not what they do:* Why, what evil have they done; or what disasters do they threaten?—They covet no man's silver or gold. *They*

* Acts, ch. iii. and iv. † 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.

They seek no posts of honour in your kingdom. They are neither robbers of temples, nor blasphemers of lawful dignities. They offer to draw forth no sword from its sheath: they call for no fire from heaven to burn up infidel or schismatical cities! They sound no trumpet of revolt or rebellion: They will shed no rivers of blood. They wear no concealed poniards in their bosom: they are followed with no executioners with axes, nor bring in their train, racks, or wheels, or gillotines, to torture or to kill. Their hearts would smite them if they should injuriously assault the meanest mortal on earth; and how should they stretch forth their hands against those who are called gods.—If they saw an enemy hunger, they would feed him; if thirsty, they would give him drink, instead of seeking his life. Like their heavenly Master, they come not to destroy mens lives, or to fill higher the bitter cup of human woes, but to save and to console. The message of peace is in their mouth, and the law of kindness is in their heart. Such is every true gospel minister; and such every genuine subject of the gospel.—Such would even every society of men be, if the gospel were universally diffused, and the grace of the Redeemer felt among the nations, bringing every thought to the obedience of Christ. Then wasting and destruction would no more be heard in the abodes of men. “The wolf and the lamb would dwell together, the leopard would lie down with the kid, and the cow and the bear would feed, their young ones should lie down together; and the lion should eat straw like the ox. Nothing would hurt or destroy in all the holy mountain;—when the earth should be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*.”

In this brief statement and exculpation of the Secession on the head of their principles, it will not be reckoned needful that we should recur to former times, and attempt to vindicate the system adopted by our forefathers, who began, promoted, and settled the former reformation, although we have all along expressed, with some few exceptions, a hearty approbation of it, and avow a coincidence with them in their main principles and design. We know well that some doctrines taught
by

* If. xi.

by the Reformers of Scotland, as well those maintained by the sufferers of the last age, about the rights of a people in reference to oppressive governments, and their interest and duty in attempting and maintaining reformation, where rulers may be neglecting to interfere, or may be actively opposing, have been greatly exclaimed against by a certain set of men and writers, both at home and abroad. And the whole of their proceedings, while the supreme power was not concurring with them, have been grievously calumniated, as irregular, illegal, seditious, particularly their holding meetings without warrant for religious worship, or for consulting about common measures; their associating for defending the liberty of the professors of the gospel, and its ministers, and supporting the intrinsic right of ecclesiastical judicatories, when attacked and about to be crushed by the sovereign, under the influence of evil counsel, sometimes equally against the gospel and the notional laws. Innumerable libels were written, many large volumes compiled, and statute-books swelled with acts, representing these measures, and the public bonds and oaths whereby they were consolidated, as the blackest treason. The repelling the Marian tyranny and the French faction supporting it, by the Lords and people of the congregation;—the struggles of the ministry and some church-assemblies in James the First's time, have been so decried. Even presbytery from the beginning, and all along, has been by many denounced, as a mover of sedition, a friend and cherisher of democracy, but inconsistent with the rights of monarchy. The troubles in the beginning, and the conventions and whole proceedings in behalf of popular liberty and reformation during the civil wars, have been a thousand times stigmatized with the same odious names. The necessary resistance then made, though sanctioned by the parliaments of both kingdoms, stands recorded in the annals and some famed histories of these times as the *Grand Rebellion*.—The Covenanters have been compared to the Popish leaguers, and Presbyterians classed with Anabaptists, regicides, levellers, &c.—But who were the men, and what were their views, who have thus traduced them? None but a popish and malignant faction, avowed ene-

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mies to the liberties, and many of them to the religion, of Protestants.—Court sycophants, pensioners on the smiles, or expectants of the favours of arbitrary princes; patrons of absolute, uncontrollable will in kings, and of passive obedience and non-resistance in subjects. What tongues or pens were they, but those of royal chaplains, or spiteful deposed prelates—of Oxfordian and Aberdonian doctors devoted to a despotic court, supporters equally of the divine institution of monarchy and prelacy? Who but the Spottiswoods, the Maxwells, the M'Kenzies, the Heylins, the L'Estranges, the Fowlises, the Clarendons, the Walkers, the Hickes, the Lessies, and the men of their stamp?—We hope it will not be required of us, at this advanced æra of British liberty, to produce a defence of the general principles and conduct of our Reformers against such attacks, or to wipe off the aspersions thrown from such envenomed pens. Besides what has been written to this effect since the Revolution, this was often and satisfactorily done, nearer the time of these transactions, by the pens of a Buchanan, a Knox, a Calderwood, a Baillie, a Rutherford, a Brown, a Stirling, (to name only those of our own nation) and many more. The most religious as well as the most patriotic pens were formerly engaged in behalf of this cause: and for a considerable time, through the force of truth, and the blessing of God upon their cause, all calumny on this head, along with baffled tyranny, was obliged as ashamed, for a time, to shut its mouth: though afterwards it was permitted again to raise its voice, and of late it seems to be once more reviving.

In the course of the two dismal reigns that immediately preceded the British Revolution, not only the views of the prince and his council were hostile to the principles and proceedings of the former period, but parliaments and every department of government were brought over to co-operate with them, whereby all the former changes were again legally condemned, every act that had been passed in behalf of liberty and ecclesiastical reform was repealed, and all such principles and proceedings were declared by the legislature to be utterly unlawful or treasonable. The Secession Testimony, it is true, have not only declared themselves friendly in the main to the designs

signs and procedure thus condemned, though without extending their approbation to every step, but also have marked out these acts rescissory and other public deeds following, as sources of national guilt and permanent calamity to the churches in Britain and Ireland, while they are at the same time considered as destructive to liberty and good government. But it is well known that the worst and most inveterate tyranny, in different ages, has been often carried into effect under the shadow of some popular forms, and been maintained by the sanction of the nominal or real representatives of a people: nor is it less pernicious or detestable in this shape, than when managed solely in the name of an arbitrary individual; nor is it less consistent with duty, either in a civil or religious view, to express disapprobation of wicked acts, made in the most legal form, and by the most regular authority, than of others void of such a sanction. Neither doth the crime of sedition, disobedience, or unlawful resistance, arise only from the nature of the form of government, or the legality of the authority enacting. In all questions of morality and religion, the superior obligations laid on men and Christians, can never be invalidated by any authority, however, or by whomsoever, it may be exercised.

It should also be remembered, that the greater part of these censured acts, have, in Scotland, received the stigma of national approbation, and legal condemnation. The Revolution Parliament formally repealed a great part of them, and by other acts disarmed others of all force and operation. The principles on which the Revolution proceeded, and the general spirit and tenor of its laws, condemned a number more. The severe acts against conventions, conventicles, voluntary associations, attempting any change in church and state, &c. that hung up the bloody flag of persecution, if they were not all by name, at that time or since, cancelled from the statute-book, they were practically abrogated, and should, now and in all time coming, be held, both in law and right, as dead.

PART SECOND.

Of the CONDUCT of SECEDERS, in reference to some late POLITICAL DISSENTIONS, and the SOCIETIES for REFORM.

IF no relevant charge can be brought against the General Associate Synod, or its adherents, on the head of principles, it may next be proper to enquire, whether any can be fixed upon them, with greater justice, on account of the part they have acted in the late public ferment, and in reference to the societies and measures for political reform. It may be possible that, in some unguarded hour, they may have forgotten their place and duty in civil society, and even in opposition to their better principles, may have failed in their respect to lawful authority. But we hope it will not be more difficult to wipe off this aspersions, in the eyes of the impartial, than the former. As to the general tenor of their conduct, in this view, at the commencement, and during the former period of their secession, something has already been occasionally noticed. Except, in the matters of their God, in no particular instances or facts, have they been found worthy of blame: As their own consciences bore witness to the sincerity of their loyal professions, so they have been enabled, for a long course of time, to deport themselves in such a manner, as to draw down no particular severity, public censure, or even suspicion, so far as we know, from those who had the greatest interest, and the most immediate concern, in superintending their behaviour. It would be somewhat strange if they had now all at once forgotten both their duty and prudence, and made themselves transgressors.

It is only in reference to the part they have acted in some late political dissensions, either in a way of omission or commission, that their conduct is now particularly arraigned, and for which their loyalty or peaceableness, by some it seems, is brought into question. The remarks we propose farther to make, will therefore be confined to chiefly these heads. The popular societies lately formed, and the plans and resolutions adopted by them, with a view to obtain a reform in some departments of the government or civil constitution, having been so deeply crimi-

criminated, the charges primarily brought against these, have gradually been extended to all, who took any active share therein, or had concurrence therewith, or were even supposed to look upon them and their proceedings with a favourable eye: and thus Seceders are brought in for their liberal share, in order to make both together, in this connection, appear more odious.—Hence we suppose came the broad hints, in the publication above referred to, of opposing the measures of government, and engaging in plots and conspiracies, “to subvert the constitution †,” &c.

Though all subjected to such general indiscriminate charges, and intemperate reflections, if the matter of them be neither obvious nor proved, may have cause to complain of such unfair and injurious procedure, yet as they are meant to operate against a religious society of people, situated as the Seceders long have been, for conscience sake—devoid of secular influence or patronage of any kind, removed from any immediate intercourse with government or men of power, which might give them a favourable opportunity of vindicating themselves, they appear doubly malevolent and injurious. Besides their ordinary character, and temporal interests in society, which, in common with those of others, may be affected thereby, they have more precious interests at stake, which they ought to account dearer to them than all others in the world. But a few words may suffice with the cool and candid, to remove the imputation of guilt and shame from their body in this matter, to fall on the head of their accusers.

It is not our intention, nor is it at all necessary, or competent to us, to enter into any particular enquiry into the merits of the general cause, between these societies and their accusers, as we wish carefully to avoid all political discussion; and whatever might be our own private sentiments on such a subject, it would be equally improper for us to criminate them on the one hand, or attempt a formal vindication of them, or any associated with them, on the other, seeing they have already been made responsible for their conduct, and are in a capacity, and possessed of ability, for vindicating themselves, if injured.

† Essays, p. 54.

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On a subject however that has so much engaged public attention, we hope we may be indulged in the following brief reflexions; which, we doubt not, a calmer review, and mature experience will justify: We have, from the beginning, considered it as matter of regret, and a sign of divine displeasure against the nation, that such a spirit of accusation and recrimination, has had such unbounded scope; particularly, that charges of total disaffection to a British sovereign, and of hostile designs against the whole constitution, should have been so assiduously circulated, and so readily entertained, by one part of the nation against another—even against whole bodies and associations of men, without the clearest evidence appearing, while all were agreed still in professing the warmest attachment to the form and great principles of the civil government, settled among us, in paying the readiest subjection to legal authority, and regard to the order and peace of society:—That without due discrimination or examination, on account of some individuals who may have adopted other sentiments and views, so many, who, from their general character and tenor of conduct, might have been still ranked among the sober, the well-principled, and well-affected part of the community, should all at once have been involved in the charge, because of certain opinions or countenancing particular measures which they saw to be of no such import, disclaiming all such odious consequences drawn from them:—That this charge should have been persisted in, through the heat of party, as if it had been clear and undoubted, even in opposition to the avowed declarations, and most solemn protestations, of people, hitherto approved as loyal and peaceable, and who had not utterly forfeited all claim to veracity; that men of this description (which we were disposed to believe included the greater body of those who took part in these societies, and favoured their general design) should have been made responsible either for what the hasty imputations and strained inferences of their accusers laid upon them, or for the extravagant notions, or dangerous schemes of some individuals who had mixed with them, while openly disavowed by them—we knew not how to reconcile to the law of Christian charity or common equity. Nor

did this seem to be the mode best adapted to maintain public tranquillity, and prevent farther excesses; but treatment of this sort natively tended to make the best subjects really disaffected. Without attempting to censure the legislative or judicial decisions, we could not but bewail this as a striking instance, wherein national wisdom and good policy failed in our land, and as a leading error in point of procedure in reference to the recent disputes; which was both a presage of the approach of a day of public confusion and calamity, and, in our humble opinion, a mean of hastening it forward: and to this the dangerous ferment, and manifold mischiefs, which have arisen, or may arise, in the course of these contentions, may be visibly traced.

But whether all or any, of these political societies for Parliamentary Reform, or any embodied with them, were really chargeable with such dangerous principles, or seditious proceedings, as have been imputed to them, or not,—neither the principles of the Secession-body, which they have not changed, nor their loyal conduct, can justly be impeached, or in the least affected thereby; while as a religious society they profess no knowledge nor connection with any such men. Could any be pointed out to whom such evil designs and practices are applicable, they would not scruple instantly to put away from among them such wicked persons. Nor in that capacity are they responsible for any of the principles or proceedings of these societies, farther than as these may coincide with the principles or measures which had formerly been adopted and generally approved in prosecution of religious reformation: Neither in their first formation, or plans of procedure, had they any peculiar activity or interest.

As to the rise of these societies, is well known, that the design was first formed and promoted by a number of men, not in the lower rank of life, but men conversant with the state of public affairs; and some of them beside their distinguished rank and political knowledge, possessing a place, by the choice of their country, in the national legislature. These, as they declared, from a sense they entertained of prevailing corruption and abuses, and the degree to which they had risen, thought it their duty

duty to call the people at large to declare their sentiments; and not in a clandestine plotting manner, but after a public notification of the design to parliament.

It may readily be supposed, that there would be a difference of sentiments both among the ministers and people of our communion, as there were among all other classes of men, about the object and views of these new associations, and about some public measures of the present administration, of great consequence to the interests of this nation and of Europe; as usually has been the case as to similar political questions and variable measures of former administrations: but they never apprehended this to be a necessary indication of a seditious disposition, or a symptom of disaffection. If the private sentiments of a majority of them might perhaps incline to that side which professed at least to aim at the correction of some acknowledged evils, and to desire the cultivation of public peace; in this were they to be blamed, if they pursued neither of these desirable objects by any irregular or illegal means? As they did not in consequence proceed to make any alteration in their own religious constitution, or to declare any new principles on the subject of government, popular rights, or ecclesiastical reform, so neither did they forsake the usual line of ecclesiastical business, by bringing these societies, or the political questions discussed by them, to be subject of deliberation in any Synods or Presbyteries, so as to pass any public judgment about them whatever.—Neither did they think themselves at liberty, upon these new incidents arising, in the zeal of jarring factions, to renounce any principles, formerly declared, or any privileges formerly pled, on any of the foregoing heads, to court the favour, or avoid the obloquy, of either party.

Individuals of their body in different parts of the country, either from a conviction that the reform proposed was needful, and conducive to public good, either in itself, or as it might facilitate the way for a readier removal of some ecclesiastical grievances of more importance in their view—and from a persuasion that the means proposed for attaining it were dutiful and peaceable;—or from the influence of the sudden blaze of popular fervor and apparent patriotism, from the heedless impulse of the

the day, or from whatever motive, doubtless took a part with others in such societies. But this they did entirely of their own accord, without ministerial authority interposed either to excite or to dissuade them: and this they did, in the exercise of a common right, belonging to them as members of society, as well as other subjects;—a right which they did not derive from religious society, and which no authority in it could justly deprive them of.—Few of these, it may be supposed, were duly reflecting upon the import of that in which they were engaging in concurrence with others; few of them might be capable of taking in its full extent and tendency, or the probable consequences that might arise from it, more than to foresee the train of difficulties into which their perseverance in it, (if they had had the resolution to persevere) might have involved them. With some the general idea or design of a reform, without any particular attention, or predilection for; the specific plan proposed, or modes of prosecuting it, might be sufficient to allure them. Had there been indeed deep plots and treasonable designs formed by the prime movers or conductors of the business, while these were far from being obvious, these people, being so little acquainted with political manoeuvres, or party-finesse, and having so little access to be intimately instructed in the views of their leaders, had they been really seduced, what was said of some of the multitude who were unawares drawn into Absalom's revolt, might well be pled in their behalf;—"They went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing*."—But even though there had been criminal intentions, and criminal actions too, found and proved to have prevailed among them, would it be just, for the rashness, or guilt of a few individuals, acting in that case, in no concert with the religious body to which they belonged, to criminate the whole society?

It doth not appear, that the number of those who took any active part in these societies, in connection with the General Associate Synod, bore any considerable proportion to the whole; or that there was a greater proportion from the people of that communion, than from other religious denominations in the land. But if it had been otherwise,

* 2 Sam. xv. 11.

otherwise, that circumstance could not have been imputed to any special interest they could have in the design proposed, or attributed to any immediate relation that the specific plan of reform pled for by these societies, bore to that which was the great object of the testimony and association of Seceders. If any of them considered them as coincident, or necessarily connected together, a small degree of reflection might have served to convince them of their mistake.—The sole object to which the former confined their attention was very foreign to the design of a church-association. They directly proposed no reform of the corruptions in the ecclesiastical establishments in either kingdom. Most of them in the terms of their association, and in resolutions published by them, admitted such general, ambiguous, or unlimited professions of approbation of the British constitution and laws, as did not consist with the constant caution, and stated objection, maintained by the latter, as to any oaths or unqualified declarations on that head, lest they should be found approving, and engaging to perpetuate, even many of these evils which by their religious testimony they had specified as needing reform. Seceders, who understood their principles, and abhorred either deceit or inconsistency, found, in these unlimited professions, where admitted, sufficient ground of scruple, and an insuperable bar laid in their way of enrolling themselves in these societies, however well-disposed they might otherwise be to the general design, and many of them also to the particular plan of reform. Neither could it escape their observation, that many who most heartily and zealously promoted these associations, were persons of a very different spirit and principles from religious reformers; who were as far from being friendly to the truths of the gospel, and as unlikely to contend in earnest for any church-reform, from a real love to it, as any of those perhaps on the other side, who were keenly defending the established system. Among the number might have been discovered, besides abundance of Socinians and Deists, many thoughtless and indifferent, many totally unacquainted with such matters, and many wholly disaffected and averse to any such change. As for the rest, who might be sober, intelligent, and well-affected to-

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wards such a design, though we should grant them to have been the major part, it is evident that, either from a persuasion that any explicit proposal of ecclesiastical reform would, at that juncture, have been unseasonable, impracticable, or unfavourable, to the design immediately in view, or from the diversity of sentiments that would have arisen, and of plans that might have been proposed, among persons so divided from one another in respect of religion, or from whatever other cause—they also readily concurred in the general resolution to meddle with no matters of this kind: and thus on all hands, this design, which every true witness for Christ will have above all things at heart, was abandoned, buried in silence, and by some of the leading societies, at last formally and totally disavowed †. This being the case, it would have been strange inconsiderateness, and blind precipitation, if the Associate Body had considered that cause as identified with their own, or as standing in any peculiar connection with it: or if they had considered it as having any immediate claim upon them, or call to them, as a religious body, for their zealous support.

Had all that was directly proposed in that plan of reform been gained, it doth not appear that they could have reaped any peculiar advantages, or had cause to rejoice more than others. That might have been attained, and yet the special design, and great desired object, of their association, that has lasted for half a century past, might have been as far from being accomplished, and as far removed from view, as ever; either in respect of the public state and management of national affairs, or in regard to the religious disposition and conduct of the people. A civil reform by no means infers, or is necessarily accompanied with one that is religious. The giving a greater degree of influence to the popular interest in the legislature, or increasing the number of votes in the election of representatives, whatever other advantages may be supposed to have arisen from thence, would not have insured this, while the body of the people might remain unenlightened, and corrupt, as well as princes, ministers of state, and the men of higher rank. The introduction of a few more representatives into the British parliament,

† See Horne Tooke's Trial.

parliament, or multiplying popular electors, was a change that wore no peculiar aspect of favour to them or their cause, in the present spirit and disposition of the times, and while the greater part of the people continue in their ignorance, indifference, or hatred, to the specific plan of religious reform pursued in the Secession, and to the system of Presbyterian principles formerly adopted and sworn to in these nations. Nor could this have produced any greater degree of influence to them, either in the political or ecclesiastical state, while none belonging to their body could have any place or voice either in the representation or election, all the old constitutional acts, and qualification-oaths, which pronounce upon them an exclusion for conscience sake, being supposed to remain unaltered. All that they could reasonably have looked for, in such a reformed state of matters, would have been mere protection, and the liberty of maintaining their religious profession: and this is what, in the good providence of God, we have long enjoyed, and hope still to enjoy, with thankfulness, under the government even as presently constituted and administered.

Still less could they, or any good man, have expected to find their advantage in the accomplishment of the extravagant schemes, and pernicious designs, imputed to these societies by their adversaries. If the total change of the constitution, the subversion of all authority, the abolition of all established religion, and the destruction of all order in society were indeed in contemplation, how barren, how gloomy, and how tremendous was the prospect! Taking the scheme at best, as intending to change the British monarchy into a republic---what superior excellencies could be seen in the latter, even by the eyes of its fondest admirers, sufficient to counterbalance the hazard and certain dangers in the attempt? What could appear to warrant it, in the eye of prudence or humanity, in opposition to the prejudices, inclination, and powerful acting authority of the nation? Particularly, what was in this change so much on the side of morality or religion, so decisively in favour of a Presbyterian reform of the church, as to induce the friends of these, to forego present advantages and safety, and embark in such a precarious and perilous adventure? Though some forms

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forms of civil policy, and modes of public administration, doubtless may have a greater tendency to promote public good, and some of them may be better framed either for preventing public grievances, of any kind, or to afford a people who complain of them an easier access, and more probable prospect of success, in redressing them, than some others; yet such a beneficial effect, especially in reference to morality and religion, doth not always attend them, nor is inseparably attached to the best of them. Without men be influenced by the fear of God, and the authority of Jesus Christ, unless moral principles take fast hold of the heart, no change of mere political government, or of any external circumstances in life, can make them better and more holy. In the event of a more enlarged system of liberty, succeeding to a government severe or tyrannical, it is possible that many external barriers may be removed out of the way of religious reformation, by oppressive and restrictive laws in reference to ecclesiastical affairs being abolished: the system of external liberty may be enlarged, but the internal principle of religion may be wanting, or evils of another kind, perhaps of a more baneful kind, may arise after the other, to prevent the desired effect.

All the intelligent must know, that an irreligious and unreformed people can never properly exert themselves in behalf of religion, either in their public acts, or in their private conduct: they must know and admit, that the valuable rights of conscience and ecclesiastical liberty may be the object of political jealousy and popular hatred, where popular influence bears full sway, as well as where monarchy, aristocracy, and tyranny are predominant. They can recollect, that a Socrates was condemned to die, on pretence of alienating the citizens from the worship of the gods of his country, by the votes of a popular assembly: Nay, that Jesus Christ himself was condemned, and crucified, at the instance, and repeated clamorous vociferations, of the giddy multitude, as well as by the votes of the Sanhedrim, and through the envy and conspiracy of high priests and corrupt statesmen. They can find, upon search, instances of intolerant edicts, and of inquisitorial courts, committing violence on the consciences of Christians, and making havoc
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of the church of God, in republican cities and states, as well as in monarchical governments. Presbyterians in Scotland can yet remember how much the freedom of their ecclesiastical meetings suffered during the prevalence of a bastard-republic in the days of Cromwell.

If the friends of religion might still entertain such apprehensions as to the event of such political changes, even when accomplished with greatest unanimity, and with least commotion, there would be much less reason for any wise or good men to look for advantage from the embroilment of public affairs, a state of general anarchy, the overthrow of governments and the desolation of nations;—circumstances and days in which no flesh can promise themselves safety. It would be the highest folly for any to expose themselves and common interests to certain shipwreck, and to part with valuable enjoyments, from the precarious hope of saving something out of the general wreck. It is not the disposition of any true servants or fearers of the Lord, to desire the evil day, even from the prospect of probable deliverance that may arise, or of reformation in the church of God, that may succeed it. For though public convulsions and calamities may be necessary in the plan of divine operations, to bring about such a change, and usually are employed in it, especially where corruptions have become inveterate, and are so deeply rooted in the frame and constitution of nations, as that no peaceable and milder methods, when tried, prove successful in eradicating them; yet the over-ruling operations of a sovereign Providence are not the rule of duty to men. He who “sits on the floods” can rule and compose the tempest at will: he makes the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder he will restrain. He knows how to bring good both out of natural and moral evil. He is most holy and just in effecting that which it may be unlawful for men to hasten forward by any activity of theirs. Though the destruction of the Jewish polity, and other public calamities foretold by our Lord, were to be viewed as forerunners of “a day of redemption drawing near” to all faithful Christians; yet he directs them to all lawful and prudent methods to evade them: so far from having cause to wish for such days of vengeance, or to be active in procuring them,

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his disciples are enjoined to pray, if not absolutely for averting them, seeing they were determined, yet for a mitigation of them, in which they are encouraged by the promise, that "for the elect's sake the days should be shortened, or no flesh could be saved." In such cases it becomes them to revere his awful procedure, in patience and in hope to submit to all his will; yet they should never willingly chuse to be "the men, who are his sword," for executing a work of judgment, much less to adopt unlawful means for accomplishing such events. The design that is holy in the divine hand, may be an accursed work as managed by its instruments; as David said, concerning the persecution of Saul, "If the Lord hath stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering; but if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the Lord."

Besides, the good that may arise to the church from such convulsions is not always visible, nor simultaneous. They may prove destructive not only to individuals, but to a whole generation of degenerate professors: and the interests of religion, as well as those of another kind, may, for a long time, perish among them; and as to some particular nations they may do so finally. For public calamities sometimes, so far from being medicinal, are vindictive and deadly, terminating in the total overthrow and rejection of a sinful people, at least for many ages; as Jerusalem was given up to be trodden down of the Gentiles, till the time of the Gentiles should be fulfilled; as the Christian part of the Roman empire, both in the east and west, was desolated by the inundation of Barbarians; and as the Asian churches lost their freedom, and many of them their very existence, under the banner and rapid conquests of Mahomet; though there is reason to think that the great revolutions in these latter days will rather tend to bring kingdoms under the reign of Christ, than to subject them to the yoke of his enemies; and that the current of the last wasting plagues, is directed against the Antichristian nations, rather than for the ruin of any reformed church retaining its faith and purity.

But setting aside the alledged plots, and dangerous schemes, all along disclaimed by the public abettors of

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the reform in question, who will say that such a design, in a general view of it, was either unlawful in itself, or improper for any class of men, who might be convinced of the necessity of it, to encourage in a dutiful and regular way? Where is the society so perfectly constituted, or the government so wisely administered, that may not admit of improvement, or that will not, in process of time, present a number of errors and abuses that may require correction? Though a religious society as such may have no peculiar interest in promoting a civil reform, yet to promote it when needful is the interest and duty of all. Pure religion, instead of restraining any from such a design, will aid public spirit, and make men in every station more zealous for removing evils of every kind, and promoting public weal. If it be true, as has so often been asserted, and never disproved, that in Britain corruption, in various branches, has grown to such a scandalous height, as to outrage all morality and common honesty, as well as religion;—if places of public trust are openly bought and sold, if the representatives of a nation are rendered mercenary and servile by bribery and undue influence; if oaths and perjuries are nothing accounted of; if profusion, drunkenness, riot, and intrigue, are the chief marks of the times for public elections; if interest and gain may be allowed to assert their claims in opposition to the laws of justice and morality; if many enormities like these prevail, why should any man be condemned, for giving his voice or quota of assistance for providing a remedy? If any administration, in a nation where such evils should confessedly exist, should state an avowed opposition to every proposition and every species of reform, however limited, or regularly sought, such men, from that moment, would render themselves unworthy of public confidence, by becoming open patrons of a system of corruption, and declared enemies to the improvement and good of society: they would, instead of the countenance, justly deserve the censure, of all good men. And if such an unqualified opposition to every proposal of reform, moderate or immoderate, be adopted and adhered to, in a free nation, in contempt of the declared will or general wish of the people, it must farther imply hostility against their constitutional

stitutional rights and liberties, and in that case, tyranny would be superinduced to corruption, and employed for its support. Nor can any pretended fear of excess, or dangerous consequences that may occasionally, though they do not necessarily, arise from a needful reform, warrant such a determined and unqualified resolution; because such fears are best obviated, and such dangers most effectually prevented, by granting what is just and reasonable, and by the speedy abolition of evident evils and causes of grievance, rather than by patronizing them: While they are retained, turbulent and ill-designing men will be able to carry on their schemes with greater plausibility and effect. A government must always acquire greater strength, and national safety be more firmly secured, against the designs of either open or secret enemies, by satisfying the minds and conciliating the affections of the moderate and the good, than by irritating them by unjust suspicion and ill-usage, and thrusting them into the same scale with the extravagant and mischievous. And it would be absurd to suppose, that any legislature can be less able to refuse extravagant propositions, if they should afterwards be brought forward, or to combat and crush destructive schemes, if they should spring up, by their previously adopting those that may be equitable and salutary; than they can be at first instances to refuse and combat every proposal of reform, reasonable or unreasonable, against the general sense of a large body of well-affected subjects, and amidst great discontents and complaints arising from the refusal of a redress of public grievances.

Besides, the rejection of every idea of reform, or a condemnation of it on such general grounds as may always be found or pretended for opposing any particular plan of it, may justly be considered as striking equally against a religious reformation of a legal establishment, as against a civil.——Without maintaining the general principle, and contending for the common right, no society can consistently plead for them, or apply them in any particular case. For a religious body constituted for the express purpose of promoting a reform of the former kind, as the Associate Synod is, to abandon the principle, and condemn the right, would be to overthrow the very
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foundation of their own constitution, to forget and counteract one great design of their association, and to make themselves transgressors. The same may be said as to the methods and regular means, whereby the design of a reform, civil or religious, may be prosecuted, while the government or greater part of a nation may be reluctant or opposing; such as meetings, voluntary associations, correspondence, bonds and engagements to one another, publishing declarations, framing petitions, and the like. These may be equally needful and proper, in certain circumstances, in carrying on the design of an ecclesiastic-political reform, as well as one of another kind. The right in these is not to be relinquished or condemned, though it should sometimes be employed in a bad cause, or in a factious manner. Those who may have formerly availed themselves of these, or who hereafter may have occasion to have recourse to them, in promoting a good cause, or who would reckon themselves injured, were they to be restrained from doing so, would be chargeable with great inconsistency, if they condemned that right in others. By such unwary conduct, they would preclude all future reformation, or render it still more arduous, by disabling themselves or others from using such means as may be needful for prosecuting it, in any case whatever.

This may sufficiently account for the greater part of the ministers of the General Associate Synod declining to join in the severe reprobation of the proposed reform, in the invectives against those who promoted it, or in the censures passed upon societies formed for petitioning and concerting measures in behalf of it, in a dutiful subjection to the legislature.—As the business was more immediately of a secular nature, they reckoned it as incompetent for them in their ecclesiastical capacity, publicly to condemn, as it would have been to promote; though many ministers and courts of the church seem to have considered it as excluded from their province only on the side of countenance, but not of condemnation. They did not think themselves justifiable in adopting the intemperate language, and venting the abuse, so common for a time: they did not, they durst not, carry railing accusations and charges into the sanctuary itself, and

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pour them forth before God and men, while the evidence supporting them did not appear satisfactory.— The freedom used by too many on this and some public topics connected with it, in sacred administrations, we are afraid, have tended nothing to the credit of religion or its ministers, or to the honour of the spirit of moderation, so much boasted of in this age. Whatever others might do, they durst not varnish over public corruption, and deny the existence of almost every grievance. Knowing how rarely a spirit of reform can in any cause be excited among a people, and with what difficulty it is preserved alive, however much such a spirit might need to be directed and regulated, yet they durst not declaim against a sudden but feeble attempt of this kind as the greatest of crimes, or to paint it in such colours as to make the very name odious, so that all public iniquity might henceforth boldly lift up its head in triumph. Whatever they might think of the specific plan, they durst not in that wound the general cause of liberty, nor shackle the hands of all people ever after who should think fit to assume the character of reformers: they would not condemn the common cause of reformation, and their own.

The questions at issue, in their general view and remote tendency, were of a very delicate nature, and of unspeakable importance. They may be said, to have involved the liberties of nations, and the general cause of Protestant churches. If the right to reform be rashly condemned, and the ordinary means by which it hath been promoted, however peaceably used, be indiscriminately censured, how could the reformation in most of these churches, formed on the same principle and conducted by similar methods, admit of vindication, or the common calumnies of Papists against it be effectually wiped off? Are we to condemn these churches, in their first formation and progressive advancement, as so many illegal cabals and seditious assemblies, because they began to reform without public leave, and because they went faster and farther than the rulers in those times wished? Was there no danger, by such a damnatory sentence, of reflecting a heavy censure in particular on the proceedings in our own land, both in the first and second period of ecclesiastical reform? Could those, who had

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all along borne such an honourable testimony to that cause, as a work accomplished under the Spirit and by the mighty hand of God, voluntarily say or do any thing, that might seem again to consign it over to all that ignominy which its inveterate enemies have always thrown upon it, on account of the measures which, history informs us, they were obliged to take for promoting it, while the court was disapproving or opposing? Were they thus to use lightness, in the matter of their religious profession, and accommodate their language and sentiments to the changeable mode of the time? Or could they forget that they themselves had associated on a similar design, and sworn by the great name of God, "that, by all means which are lawful and warrantable, they should, in their several places and callings, endeavour the reformation of religion in England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, according to the word of God; and to promote and advance our covenanted conjunction and uniformity in religion;—and to encourage and strengthen one another's hands, in pursuing the end and design of this their solemn oath and covenant." After they had thus opened their mouth to the Lord, were they to draw back either for the fear or favour of men? Or were they, at least virtually and indirectly, to represent all such designs as a contempt and conspiracy against lawful authority, and all engagements of this kind, as bonds of iniquity?

It is quite obvious, that every person who believes the reformed religion as received by the Presbyterian church of Scotland to be conform to the institutions of Christ, and who, from the conviction of the beneficial tendency of that system, from a sense of the divine authority, or of the obligation of former vows, shall engage for endeavour to have England and Ireland reformed according to it, must express disapprobation of many things sanctioned by authority, and seek an alteration of the established constitution and laws in so far, and in one way or another. But who will say, that all endeavours of this kind must cease, and that it must even be unlawful for any to meet to deliberate on any grievance in church or state, till it shall please those in authority, of their own accord, to make the alteration? Or who will say, that such endeavours

deavours may not be used and persisted in by subjects, and even the design effected at last, without force or tumult, as Paul was found performing his vow of purification in the temple, till the band of persecuting Jews first excited them, and then charged the riot on the innocent and peaceable?

If the doctrine and measures, which some have pled for of late, in opposition to proposals and peaceable modes of civil reform, were to be admitted and applied to an ecclesiastical one wherein secular laws and authority may be concerned, not only are former reformatations branded with infamy, but every prospect of farther reformation in any state or kingdom where it has not yet been attained, or where it has by the laws been left imperfect, is virtually excluded. Of consequence all ecclesiastic evils and abuses, however enormous, however ruinous to the interests of religion, or other interests of men, must continue from age to age, as they are already settled, or presently supported by an existing administration in any land, at least till civil rulers be pleased to change their mind, and move their hand to the work of reform. If the doctrine be good in one land or period, it must be so in another. According to it then, not only must an Erastian supremacy, or what some have fitly termed a Cæsarean Popery, be silently and tamely allowed to rule with absolute sway in Protestant churches; not only must the old constitution of popish kingdoms, and every title and prerogative bestowed on their princes or prelates, remain for ever unquestioned, but along with these, the supremacy of the Czar and of the Grand Signior, in matters of religion, must be held inviolable. Together with the laws of the Inquisition, those of Brama, and of the governments of China and Japan, must be revered to perpetuity: no persons individually, or in associated bodies, may attempt, in the spirit and according to the rules of Christianity, to bring about a change, without the concurrence of the men, whose hand is chief in the trespass, and whose interest lies in supporting the ancient abuses. What is this, but to exalt civil rulers to an unlimited sovereignty, over, not only the bodies and outward estate of men, but also their faith and consciences; and to sacrifice all the interests of the Redeemer and the liberties

liberties of the Christian church to their absolute will. Those who love either religion or liberty—those who profess themselves admirers and imitators of the steps of the glorious band of reformers and martyrs—and who have solemnly devoted themselves to the promoting of a Christian reformation through these kingdoms, and every other, according to the small degree of their influence, may well be excused, if they tremble to subscribe to any doctrines or measures that may involve in them such consequences, or that may seem, in the remotest manner, to approach to them.

But the cause of public reform in Britain, and all who professedly befriend it, has, it seems, of late years, suffered and assumed, in the eyes of certain politicians, its most criminal colouring, from the necessary connection it is supposed to have with the Revolution of France: All who have associated for such a design, or look friendly upon it, are concluded to be approvers of the late change of government there: not only so, but to be friends to all the anarchy, ferocity, and scenes of blood, that accompanied it: and farther still, that they must be persons who meditate as entire a change and subversion of the British civil constitution, and are determined on accomplishing it by similar means. But neither have Seceders, it is hoped, any peculiar interest in this charge, more than in the preceding. Their association, and the reform it proposes, was neither formed in concert with France, nor with any view to what has recently happened in it. The Convention or foreign clubs have never so much as heard publicly the name of our Associate-body, in this cause; much less have they had addresses or congratulations transmitted from them. They stand therefore only upon the same common ground with myriads of other subjects in this respect, who may have occasionally discovered sentiments more favourable to the great design and general principles avowed in that revolution, than the governing administration in Britain saw meet at last to adopt: That men who love the cause of liberty in one nation, should love the appearance and progress of it in every other; or that the inhabitants of a nation, glorying in its own dearly acquired freedom, as Britain long hath done, should feel some interest in the struggle

against despotism, and rejoice in the success of it, in their neighbours in France, so long deemed a nation of slaves, needs not be accounted strange. Were a number of individuals among us to avow the heart-felt satisfaction they had, in common with such a large proportion of the nation, at the view of the wonderful change in its connection with the general cause of liberty, and the happiness of multitudes, or if they had even carried their satisfaction the length of public congratulation, they would only be avowing sentiments and emotions, of which they had no reason, either as men or Christians, to be afraid or ashamed. But if any should thence infer the above conclusions, they could only pity their judgment, or lament the perversion of their reason by prejudice, passion, or false policy. But waving here the topics of defence which such might plead in common with others on this subject, and passing in silent contempt and indignation such absurd and ill-connected consequences, it may be only needful to point out, in few words, what grounds those who had adopted the principles relative to civil government formerly declared, had to restrain them from openly joining in the invectives and resentment expressed against that neighbouring nation, or in the unqualified reprobation of their new form of government, or in giving sanction to destroy it: and the additional reasons they had, as Protestants, for declining to act such a part, from the connection this revolution had with ecclesiastical affairs.

If they had acknowledged an original and indefeasible right in every people to constitute, reform, or alter their government, how could they deny it to that people? Or after these had by general consent so constituted or altered it, how could they, who as aliens had no right whatever to decide for them, pretend to give a negative to their choice, or persist in denying the validity of it? If, in their own land, they knew no other or surer rule for judging what was the lawful government to which obedience was due for conscience sake, than the choice or consent of the nation, what other criterion were they to apply for determining the same point in another land? If authority so constituted and recognized, becomes the ordinance of God, both in respect of its internal obligation

tion, and in its external relation to other people, how can any treat it with the utmost scurrility and abuse, incite a minor part of the nation who are under it to deny it all subjection, or teach all other people to abhor it, or hold it as a non-entity, without contemning the great principle and foundation of lawful government, and without supporting the cause of disobedience, faction, and disorder? May not dignities be reviled, and the ordinance of God and man be insulted abroad as well as at home, and by the language and conduct of one nation towards another, as well as by some subjects in reference to their own particular government? If obedience and respect be equally due, for the Lord's sake, to any particular form of government thus appointed, can a change from absolute to mixed monarchy, or from that to a republic, affect the grounds of subjection, or dissolve the bonds of amity and peace with neighbouring nations?—If, when a body politic change their constitution from better to worse, and recede from reformation, its claim remains valid, should its rights be completely lost, when it advances from despotism to liberty, and proposes no other end than the good of the people, and the maintenance of general justice and peace?

But though no considerations of this kind had deterred them, had they not, as friends to the Protestant interest, abundant reason to view the progress of the late revolution with wonder, and to be aware of condemning and outrageously opposing a signal work of God, inflicting vengeance on the Antichristian hierarchy, and an idolatrous establishment, that had so long proved a yoke of iron to the oppressed church of Christ? Was it to be a small matter in their eyes, or lamented as a formidable evil, that the King of kings, by such men and means as his infinite wisdom saw meet to employ, should shake the throne of the eldest son of Rome and other persecuting despots of Europe, that he should avenge the blood of his saints at their hand, and hear the long-continued prayers of the Protestant churches for bringing down the houses of Austria and Bourbon;—that he should have abolished a corrupt priesthood, laid waste the habitations of monks and nuns, overthrown the images and altars of idols, abrogated papal, regal and prelatical patronage,

in any land; and proclaimed liberty for men to worship the true God according^d to their own consciences without fear? Were they, who have been taught to pray and wait for such stupendous changes, the vengeance of God's temple, and the year of his release, to join in the alarming outcry when they beheld their approach? Was it to be grievous to them, that a prospect was opening for emancipating nations from the shackles of ignorance, superstition, and imposing priestcraft; that the doors of the Inquisition were about to be set open; or that Rome was tottering to her foundation, that her pleasant things were laid waste, and that trembling and wailing began to fill all her proud palaces and temples, throughout all her extensive territories? Did it not rather become those who were maintaining the testimony of Jesus, to join the voice of holy Apostles and Prophets rejoicing at their fall, and to cry with the choir of saints and angels, at the sight of her calamities, "True and righteous are thy judgments!" *Amen.* HALLELUJAH!—Can they be the servants of Jesus Christ, and not rather the ministers of Satan, and the avowed friends of his kingdom of darkness and tyranny in the earth, who grieve, and fret, and rage, because the Lord Almighty hath judged thus? Instead of joining the hellish howl of lamentation and execration, on such a memorable occasion, was there not rather cause to be astonished at the blindness and infatuation that had seized so many professed Protestants, who did not know the counsel or the judgments of the Lord, nor the things that belonged to their peace?—To such a people, in such a time, was there not great reason to apply anew what is written in the Prophets; "Behold ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, which a man will not believe though it were told him?"

It may be matter of just surprize, if times are so much changed in Britain, as that any for such causes as these—for retaining the true sentiments and feelings of Protestants, should be suspected of disaffection to a Protestant government, or held forth as enemies to all authority, order and religion in the world. If we are appointed to have a share in this injurious usage, we will bear it patiently as part of the reproach of Christ, and pray that the

the men who are busy in propagating such calumnies, and in producing such false and distorted views of things, whoever they be, may be forgiven, "for they know not what they do." The same remarks may be applied to the subject of the war entered into by Britain, in conjunction with other powers, for defeating the designs of the French Revolution, for restoring abolished monarchy, and repairing the ruins of the ecclesiastical establishment in France and in other places. If the majority of the Associate-body could not approve the principle or object of such a combination—if they had not freedom to call for war and vengeance, with others, in such a cause—if they scrupled the lawfulness of rushing into hostilities against a people, long galled with a cruel yoke, while suing for friendship and earnestly insisting on peaceable negotiation, especially in behalf of interests which the Lord abhors, and against which his wrath must ever burn—they had the same weighty reasons to plead; and these operating with increased force in this case. And under these impressions, and with these views of the great national quarrel, or rather the great quarrel and decisive conflict of nations, it may be easier to vindicate the Synod from the charge of having spoken or done too much, than to free them from blame in not having done all that they might and ought to have done as a religious body, at such a remarkable crisis.

Every good man, and every friend of humanity, will ever deplore the necessity of shedding blood: the horrors of war in any case may well fill their breasts with aversion. As every state had need with good advice, and on the surest grounds, to proceed in trying this terrible expedient; so all in every station of life ought to keep their consciences free, and their hands clean, from the guilt of rash and unjust wars. The approved citizen of Zion is one who shutteth even his ears from hearing of blood. The ministers of the gospel of peace above all others have reason to stand at a distance from bloody councils, and all participation in scenes of violence and cruelty, either by direct activity, or by approbation and connivance. But besides the ordinary reasons for caution and fear, conscientious ministers and Christians might see, in this case, from the complex nature and circumstances

cumstances of the quarrel, unusual cause of scruple or
 aversion. Had they no reason to dread, lest they should
 hereby accelerate a day of public calamity, foreign and
 domestic? Or lest they should greatly increase national
 guilt, as well as public dissensions and burdens, by a
 hasty and unprovoked aggression?—Lest they should be
 accessory to the whole designs and cause of those who had
 first begun hostilities, for the purpose of restoring the
 former despotism, and abrogated ecclesiastical jurisdic-
 tion, such as had been declared by the claim of right in
 our own land, an intolerable grievance, and such as had
 been abolished in part in every reformed nation?—Lest
 they should be found, not merely to condemn, but to fight
 against the general right and principles of reformation, ci-
 vil or ecclesiastical, as the fertile source of anarchy, rebel-
 lion, and every evil? Nay, had they no reason to be afraid,
 lest they should be found herein fighting against God, and
 plotting against the sure decree and predicted work of his
 Anointed—lest they should be found standing in his way
 in the execution of his fearful work of vengeance, on his
 Antichristian enemies and persecutors, in these last days,
 when he must tread the wine-press and destroy the kings
 of the earth, and their armies gathered together against
 him? Was there no danger to be apprehended, in a Pro-
 testant nation again joining in affinity with the people
 of these abominations—of their becoming partakers of
 Babylon's sins, and responsible for the blood of saints and
 murdered souls that is in her skirts, and so of receiving
 of her plagues?—By plunging into the midst of this war,
 under pretence of bridling the violence and punishing the
 audacity of turbulent men, or of restraining the excesses
 of a licentious populace, was there no danger of a Pro-
 testant people losing views of the steps of their Redeemer
 and of his holy and adorable designs, amidst the doings
 and blind conflicts of men, employed in the active scene;
 and in the heat and hurry of a national quarrel, forget-
 ting the great public interests of the church and of man-
 kind, and all proper exercise about these stupendous pro-
 vidences, in a transport of indiscriminate resentment and
 revenge against the human instruments, the men who
 were God's sword, when marked out for enemies, never
 to meet with clemency or forgiveness. Was there no
 danger

danger, from a partial and selfish view of things, of mis-
stating the public cause, and bewildering the minds of
men? By injudicious vehement declamations and exag-
geration, was there no danger of awakening every dark
and malignant passion, that thinketh nothing but evil to
its neighbour, and breathing nothing but unrelenting de-
struction, and eternal enmity? Have not many shown
themselves but too great masters in these arts, and proved
too successful in them. If the fruits have been honour-
able to religion or beneficial to mankind, let them re-
joice in them: but as for us, we will rather glory in
having never come into the secret of such men; nor taken
up their language into our lips. We have never con-
taminated the house of God, and prostituted the ordi-
nances of religion, for such purposes as these. We con-
fess we have not fasted for kindling such strife and de-
bate, or to smite with the fist of wickedness, or to awake
the sword of violence. Our prayer is pure from such un-
hallowed fire: we never presumed to invoke the God of
battles to go forth with our armies, and to crown them with
success in this enterprize: nor could we in faith request
his blessing on interests pronounced by him long ago ac-
curSED, or in attempting to associate the true God with idols.
But will it follow, that we act in concert with the enemy,
are plotters against the authority we live under, and wish
no good to the prosperity and peace of our nation? We
are sufficiently justified on this head, in the approbation
and continued peace of our own mind; and the time will
come, we doubt not, when we will also be acquitted in the
judgment of our country, when the perverse spirit that
is now mingled in the midst of it shall cease, and when
even the people who delight in war, and are now so loud
and liberal in their accusations, shall, by the over-ruling
operations of an angry Providence, and from the feeling
of the ruinous effects of their error, be brought to a
better mind.

We have not alarmed the ears of our people in reli-
gious assemblies with the noise of plots and conspiracies
ready to break out, to overthrow all government, and
fill the land with assassination and massacre, nor durst
we libel certain descriptions and societies of men before
the Lord, as hatching or patronizing such shocking crimes,
even

even when the voice of authority might seem to point that way. When the evidence doth not appear satisfactory, those who are not hasty to take up an ill report against their neighbour, and who are restrained by the awe of the divine omniscient Majesty from uttering lies and calumnies, or even doubtful surmises before him, will reckon it much more consistent with charity and religion, in such cases, to forbear. Neither the vulgar rumour of the time, nor the voice of authority, is a sufficient warrant to the consciences of ministers or Christians in such acts, when they cannot be persuaded in their own mind. We recollect what some faithful ministers suffered in Scotland, under James VI. for scrupling to keep an anniversary thanksgiving, and to re-echo from their pulpits the language of the court in the dark and much contested matter of the Gowry conspiracy.

We have read no royal proclamations in our churches, prescribing the sentiments and strain of public prayers in reference to the state of public affairs in this turbulent period: but neither has this been done on any former occasion, as a free judgment as to causes of humiliation, about prevailing sins and dangers, and the conducting of religious worship, has always been considered by us, as a privilege belonging to the church. We have taken, in our distinct religious capacity, no active share in military enrolments or levies: ministers have not spent any part of the sabbath in publishing or enforcing edicts, or citations for such purposes: for though it were a cause in which they had freedom to take an active part, they would still consider such matters as altogether foreign to the sacred office, and the design of Christian assemblies.

Seceding congregations form no distinct department of the civil state: they cannot be legally considered as forming any part of it at all: the official administrations in them are not so much as acknowledged to exist: it would then be absurd, to suppose that they owe any peculiar and separate acts of obedience and service, as a body, to government; or that their ministers, whatever others may be supposed to be, can lie under any legal obligation to make such publications. And while no law of God or man obliged them, and while the decorum of their character and the nature of their office, as well

as well as due regard to the spiritual edification of their flocks, and to the religious observance of the Sabbath forbade them, thus to confound affairs and offices so very distinct, had they of their own accord rushed forward to such services, to act the part of civil officers, military heralds, or recruiting sergeants,—had they at such a time, and in such a cause, either seized the sword, and appeared in military array themselves, or blown the warlike trumpet to excite others to do so, or even to present their voluntary oblations to the altars dedicated to relentless carnage; or had they prostituted the authority and rewards of religion, as some have notoriously done, by holding out celestial crowns of glory, even superior to those of religious martyrs, as the certain portion of all who should lose their lives in this warfare, would they not have exposed themselves to a severer rebuke from their Lord than that once given to the disciple, who, in rash and intemperate zeal, drew the sword to smite? By such means would not their ministry have been justly blamed? Instead of acting of in the spirit of the gospel, and speaking the words of truth and soberness, would they not have resembled the fanatical priestly incendiaries in the ancient and modern crusades of Rome, or the bloody Vizirs and furious Imans of the false prophet, who, in their blustering and impious rodomontade, promise nothing less than the delights of Paradise, to the deluded victims who follow their supposed holy banners?

Perhaps too, the people of their connection may not have shown great forwardness to subscribe their names, along with their superiors, to city or county declarations, addresses, or associations, framed in opposition to the plans of reform, and expressive of full confidence in the wisdom and rectitude of administration. But while these were of a voluntary nature, required by no legal authority, surely declining to engage in them could not be imputed to any as a crime; nor need the backwardness of common people, in such cases, appear any thing strange, even though the vague and unlimited professions of attachment to the British constitution and complex system of laws, the reprobation of ideas of reform, and the approbation of particular measure

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which

which state-ministers were promoting or projecting at home or abroad (usually contained in the papers referred to,) had furnished them with no particular scruples. Peaceable and prudent people will always be averse, to involve themselves unnecessarily in public disputes and political intrigues, and wary of pledging themselves to measures that relate to matters remote from their sphere of life, and the import and consequences of which, they may be unable clearly to judge. Professions and engagements of this kind, assented to in a noisy croud, or in drunken meetings, under the influence of superiors, often without judgment, and without meaning, in which the most abject or dissipated are ready to be foremost, can be no sure bond of obedience, or even a certain criterion of popular opinion; though too often they may serve the mischievous purposes of emboldening ministers to carry on their favourite and ruinous schemes, with a higher hand. As for those societies, or clubs of gentlemen, whose zeal prompted them to devise new bonds or oaths, as tests of loyalty, not prescribed by the legislature, and who endeavoured by threats, and all means in their power, to impose them on the people indiscriminately, or on their own immediate dependents (of which instances occurred) they were surely guilty of an outrage on the constitution of their country, as well as on the rights of their fellow-subjects; and if any legal punishment was incurred, it was by those who had thus invaded the province of the legislature, rather than the people who refused compliance with their arbitrary requisitions, while disposed to live peaceably. It has been observed too, that under pretence of such engagements and associations to keep the peace, it was, in many places, remarkably disturbed; riots, insults, and disorders of various kinds, having been the chief and most apparent effects.

As for addressees to the throne, religious bodies in the situation of Seceders, having no share in public managements, receiving no emoluments, and enjoying no direct protection from government, and who are not so much as known in law, seem to have little call to intrude themselves, in their distinct capacity, upon the courts

67
which these ministers were ordered to project
cours of princes, or to attend ministerial levees: and
if we are not misinformed, the established ceremonial
hardly admits of their being received in such a capacity.
At any rate, when they have not a view of accommod-
dating themselves to the wishes of a court and adopting
its current language, prudence would advise to decline
such addresses, except when the discharge of some pres-
sing duty demands them. It may easily be conceived,
that if they were to step forward, in critical and dan-
gerous times, only to speak free and disagreeable truths,
to offer remonstrance, or faithful admonition, or were
they merely to clog their profession of loyalty and fer-
vice with unfashionable, however needful limitations†,
they would be very unwelcome guests. Seceders, who
never before considered it as a necessary mode of shew-
ing their attachment to the ruling powers, to present
addresses, even on events of the most joyful kind, in
the height of Britain's prosperity, had little induce-
ment to begin, in such turbulent times, in reference to
measures or events, that may involve in them not only
much public misery, but much national guilt.

In
† When Henry VIII. was securing to himself the
ecclesiastical supremacy which he had wrested from the
Pope, the clergy of the Synod of York, in an address,
promised subjection to him as the head of the church,
as far as the laws of Christ did permit; but the anti-
christian despot, refused to admit such a restriction,
but obliged them to submit themselves without reserve.

¶ Since the date of the foregoing Declaration, an
Address to his Majesty, from the Associate Synod,
(that commonly called the Burgher) has been published.
It is needful, for the sake of those who are not well ac-
quainted with the state of the Secession, to notice that
there are two Synods in Scotland, who still take the
name of the Associate Synod, ever since their separati-
on, in the year, 1747: and this they do often without
any discriminating designation, a circumstance that
tends greatly to mislead the public, and may impose on
those who come after, as to the real sentiments and pro-
ceedings

In regard to oaths required by legal authority, either as tests of loyalty, or as qualifications for particular offices, none of them have yet been imposed upon the people at large in Britain, and it is hoped, never will; neither have Seceders of late indicated any change of their views or practice as to any of them. Though attached to the civil constitution, they have ever declined to recognize, and engage by the solemnity of an oath to support, all that has been mixed with or appended to it; they could not swear a nullity and abrogation of for-

ceedings of either, as they are in danger of being confounded together. This vindication, the reader may know, applies only to Seceders, so far as they retain, and act in conformity to the genuine principles of the Synod, as originally constituted; which that party, in many instances, have notoriously contravened. Such an address, however, even from that Body, caused not a little surprize, especially when the well-known sentiments, and former conduct of many members of court are considered. Whatever soothing words they may, in return, have received from another quarter, they will hardly expect the hearty gratulations, even of the majority of their own body, on that account. He that looks into these first-fruits of Seceding Addresses, in order to find some rebuddings of the vigorous spirit of the old Whigs and Covenanters of last age,—any appropriate language becoming of a free ecclesiastical court,—any thing pointing to a religious improvement of the strange events of these times,—any, even the most distant hint, that those who sit at the helm of affairs, may possibly be liable to some degree of mistake or blame;—or that all from the throne to the cottage, have the highest reason to dread accumulating guilty and impending judgments,—will be greatly disappointed. Not a word of these; but the common place language of courtly professions, and unqualified approbation,—wishes of good speed in the present career,—pledging all their clerical influence with heaven or earth to advance the sacred cause! Thus they have spontaneously thrust their

mer religious Covenants, nor conscientiously bring themselves under two oaths, in any points incompatible. Though they are willing, in their station, to co-operate in the necessary services for the welfare of the community, while they can be satisfied in their own mind that they are in matter, manner, and end, lawful, yet they have not freedom to undertake the discharge of inferior offices by swearing unlimited active obedience to all the injunctions of subordinate magistrates, or to a body of laws or regulations, the full extent of which is to them undefined, and unknown. But this should be viewed as arising from a conscientious fear of an oath, and as an instance of probity, rather than disloyalty. — As it cannot be denied, on the one hand, that true allegiance, may, in heart and practice, be maintained, where there may be a scruple about the mode and extent in which it may sometimes be expressed, so on the contrary, oaths will prove but a slender tie where the sense of religion, and attachment from a principle of duty, are wanting. Those who, formerly or more lately, have trusted to imposed and reiterated oaths, as security against disloyalty and revolt, have had abundant evidence of the inefficacy of them. The experiment has usually produced scenes of perfidy and horrid profanation; while contradictory oaths have, as occasion required, been with equal readiness, swallowed by the same party.

While Seceders, in such a sacred act, abhor the doctrine of jesuitical equivocation, and mental reservation, they can as little allow the expedient of removing the objections

their shoulders beneath the immense load that is ready to crush whole kingdoms. But it is no new thing to see ecclesiastical guides, as well as others, prove “as a bowing wall, or a tottering fence,” when the storm blows. Some will not scruple to view this as an attempt at the mean arts of political finesse or duplicity, or as an over-stretch of complaisance, to which they have unawares been drawn by the blind impulse of the day; or by the influence of some timid, trimming, or spiring clergymen among themselves.

objections of individuals to public oaths, by proposing some private exceptions or explications, with which some, under the pressure of difficult circumstances, or the influence of threats or cajolment, have satisfied themselves. This they consider as no proper salvo, but rather an inveigling suare to conscience, while no change can be made, either in the terms, or legal construction of the oaths, by any authority inferior to that which enacted them, and while the explications may be at variance with the plain sense of the words, and the avowed design of the legislature in appointing them; by which means the use and chief end of an oath would be defeated.

To a Christian society so cautious to avoid ambiguous or ensnaring oaths, though required by acknowledged authority, the terms of confederation and allegiance, adopted in some new-modelled governments, wherein the omnipotence of human laws, and a supremacy in affairs of religion, and over the consciences of men, are maintained in as high a tone as ever, cannot appear in a very favourable light; much less when the solemn rites must be performed at altars dedicated to new deities, whose very names no good Christian would dare to take up into his mouth, more than those of St. Michael, or Mary, Jupiter or Juno. Nor could any, entertaining such views, connect themselves with clandestine societies, bound together by oaths of secrecy, and implicit confidence in one another, or in a few demagogues assuming the direction of them, whose designs and proceedings, shunning the light of day, must all be carried on under the veil of mystery. Were even public good, and needful reforms, the object in these associations, such methods of pursuing it would deserve condemnation, as being more suitable for the purpose of unlawful conspiracy, and dishonest deeds of darkness, than any manly, great and good design: except where tyranny domineers, and stops up every other avenue to redress, and prohibits any regular attempt to meliorate public affairs, such secret associations, and underhand measures, in a state, must not only be pusillanimous and liable to suspicion, but criminal and dangerous,
serving

serving only to expose persons engaging in them to
 vengeance, without being conducive to any real and
 effectual advantage. It deserves to be mentioned as an
 instance of the Associate Synod's care, rigidly to pre-
 serve morality, and the religion of an oath, inviolate,
 that by several acts, they prohibited among their con-
 nections certain oaths used in some corporations, trades,
 or fraternities in which they had reason to apprehend,
 people were in danger of prevarication, or of swearing
 ignorantly, superstitiously or lightly, though at the
 hazard of their own internal peace, and the diminution
 of the number of their associates. Among others, the
 rites and oaths practised in Masonic Societies, which
 have been so long foolishly honoured and frequented by all
 ranks of men in Britain, and throughout Europe; for
 which they suffered much illiberal abuse, at the time,
 from the idle, the petulant, or profligate, patrons of these
 fraternities. While national rulers, ecclesiastical and
 civil, seemed totally inattentive to either sin or dan-
 ger in these matters, they secluded from communion,
 those who had rashly entered into these combinations,
 if they acknowledged not the offence, not only on ac-
 count of the superstition and profanity introduced into
 the ceremonial of initiation, but also on account of the
 oath of secrecy and fraternal union, administered, while
 all the contents of it were not previously disclosed.
 This was long before any alarm was raised about dan-
 gers to government, morals, and religion, from the
 midnight cabals, intrigues, and impenetrable mysteries
 of these societies; while none yet dreamed that so
 many of them should actually become the seed-plots of
 sedition and treason, the nurseries of infidelity, atheism
 and extreme licentiousness, out of which should grow
 a formed system of complicated villanies, fraud, imposi-
 tion, doing evil that good may come, anarchy, incests,
 murder, assassination, and other enormities, the disclosure
 of which now astonishes Europe. It is an error common
 among men, to overlook the beginnings and lower de-
 grees of evil, and only to take a late alarm when

wickedness

wickedness ripens into atrocious crimes, and appears in its more shocking and destructive stages.

In fine, though Seceders have formed a religious association, without immediate warrant from government, for the declared purpose of promoting a public as well as private reform in the church, and indirectly, and so far as may be necessary to this, in the state also, yet their principles and views will be found very different from those adopted by many who, have assumed the name of Reformers and Enlighteners, whose schemes realized, along with some good, would be productive of much evil. Neither is the reform they seek the same; nor are the weapons, the acts, and means by which they would attain it, the same. In pursuing their object, they have always acted in the most open and ingenuous manner: they have disclosed to all the world, the nature and extent of their plan, together with the methods they think fit and competent to them for accomplishing it. It reserves to every one their place and office in society; is consistent with political peace and subordination; it disclaims the use of force, whether by domestic armaments, or correspondence with foreign governments, or invading armies: while they use their own rights, they seek not to invade those of others. They wish to preserve the life, and revive the spirit of old reformation, rather than to attempt one wholly new: they have followed examples long and well-known, and proposed for a model the best they could find. If, along with important matters common to the church, as catholic, they have particularly adverted to the past and present state of the nations and churches with which they are immediately connected, this is only fulfilling peculiar obligations to which their birth and lot in providence inevitably subjects them; and because all reasonable and practical plans of duty and reform, must be accommodated to relative and actual circumstances, and apply directly to times and objects near. If they have sanctioned their association by a solemn oath and covenant, they have herein acted agreeably to the dictates and common practice of mankind, in similar cases, to the precepts
and

and examples of holy scripture, and to the practice of most Protestant churches, when the spirit of reformation was prevalent ; and every article and word of this Covenant is submitted to the inspection of all ; the concernments of salvation, pure religion, and morality, are its objects ; the amount of it will be found to an additional engagement to perform every duty they owe to God and man : the Supreme Being is the primary party in it, and none may either hinder his subjects from paying their homage to him, nor can any on earth dissolve the obligation when once contracted.

Parties whose purposes and aims may be widely different, may often profess to have one common object, and be agreed in many points. Good and bad designs may assume the same appearance, employ the same terms, the same pretexts, the same expedients. But it is a necessary part of wisdom and of justice, to discriminate those that are distinct. Last age, when almost all the sober and reflecting part of the British people, joined in the cry for redress of grievances, men of very opposite descriptions, for a time acted in concert, as for a common cause. Though Presbyterians, and Constitutional Reformers, went hand in hand with Cromwellians, and Sectarian innovators, in checking arbitrary power, and overturning a persecuting hierarchy, yet it soon appeared, when the question of settling the nation came on, how opposite they were both in their schemes of policy and religion. In the convention-parliament, that restored Charles II., when a member was declaiming against both, and represented those who first engaged in the war in behalf of national rights, as equally culpable with those who cut off the king's head, he incurred the indignation of the house, and was severely reprimanded by the Speaker, on his knees. Nothing can be more unjust, or of a more alarming tendency than the predominant disposition of the present times, to treat all desires or plans of reformation of *whatever* kind, with indiscriminate censure or contempt ; while along with this, by an unfair mode of arrangement, all the people are thrown into two classes, and reckoned, to one of these extremes, overlooking a third or middle

class, that yet, it is hoped, constitutes a numerous, and the sounder part of the nation. Such a spirit and proceedings, if persisted in, must terminate in utter confusion and ruin. But, however long false zeal, mistaken politics, and party-prejudices may blind or pervert the judgments of men, the time must arrive, when those who preside in public affairs, as well as others, will be able to distinguish, in reference to religion in particular, between those who are zealously attached to the Christian faith and constitutions, received among Protestants, in their prosecution of further reformation, and attacks upon established corruptions, and those who attempt the same object, upon the principles of French infidels, German *Illuminati*, or an Irish Catholic union. Though the latter may be agreed with the former about many prominent evils that call for abolition, they can ever be at one, in the more important design of re-edifying the demolished or defaced fabric: The plan of the latter, when successful, will indeed rid the world of corrupt establishments and priesthood, that so long hath bewitched the nations;—but along with dross and rubbish will sweep away the golden ore. The fire of their revolutions, not satisfied with consuming *the wood, the hay, and stubble*, that men have heaped up for ages, will also burn up all that is precious. While it reduces to ashes the towers and temples of Babel, it will not spare the beautiful palaces of Zion. In popish, or other idolatrous, despotic, or intolerant nations, the operation of these principles, may doubtless, in the providence of God, remove out of the way an enormous mass of evils, and so remotely prepare for the introduction of a better system; but were they to be applied, and reduced to effect, in Protestant kingdoms, where a free government, and reformed religion, have previously been admitted and settled, their operation, in the first instance, would be unspeakably mischievous, and their effects so much the more deplorable in proportion to the greater good that would thereby be destroyed.

It cannot be supposed that any real friend of religion, can rejoice at the rise and progress of that system of innovation

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innovation that hath already produced such unexampled changes abroad, and that yet threatens to shake what is most established in other nations, in any other view than as it was directed against notorious evils, which genuine Christianity, enlightened reason, and good policy, must equally reprobate. As evils are often of a mixed kind, and affect the interests of mankind in different respects, so they may be viewed through a different medium, be approved on different principles, and by different persons in a different manner. The philosopher will attempt reform on his own ideas, the politician on his, and the Christian on principles different from, and superior to both. In the great work of national regeneration, each of these may have their distinct part to act, and their distinct ends to gain, and all of them useful; and to the greater perfection of the work, they must all conspire and act in unison together. Where the Christian hath no share, the work must necessarily be marred, and left unfinished.

But at a period when the old establishments, throughout the greater part of Europe, exhibited marks of incurable and increasing corruption, when the greatest abuses pervaded every order and department; when, at the same time, the means of information and occasions of excitement to change, were become so frequent and powerful, when the slavery of the mind, as well as the body began to be more severely felt than formerly, was it any thing surprising that persons of very different descriptions, of very different moral and religious as well as political principles, should have joined together in the cry for some new order of things? When the *mystery of iniquity*, that had reigned for ages, continued to exert force, without any essential change, when almost all the absurd notions, and superstitious practices, that had so long banished human reason, and religion together, from a great part of the world, which only those who were in the judgment of God given over to strong delusions to believe lies, could ever have embraced, and which were of such a kind as to cause us justly to wonder, how any laying claim to the prerogative of men, could, even in the darkest times, have patiently endured

endured,——when these were ever meeting the eyes of the enlightened in open day, and staring every thinking man in the face,——broaden gods, adorable images,——dead men deified,——sacred relics,——blessed beads, chrism, and crosses, *Corpus Christi* processions, carnivals, lents,——everlasting fasts or feasts,——papal bulls and dispensations,——episcopal consecrations or absolutions,——privileged drones and begging cheats,——faintly miracles old and new,——devoted lands, buildings, vestments, precious vessels,——a hierarchy of priests, with all the attendant apparatus of courts, officers, tithe-gatherers, and canonical lawyers; of all which the public laws, the sceptre, the sword, and the fires, must necessarily be the perpetual guardians and avengers ;——when these and a thousand other enormities, of which, those only who have an enlarged acquaintance with the state of the world, and with the modern history of the church, can form any proper ideas, were maintaining such a conspicuous place in the midst of the most civilized and potent nations, while diffusive knowledge expanded the understanding, and industry and arts aroused the energy of men, and while the fair fruits of civil and religious liberty were appearing in some other nations around, to incite them to gain the possession of the like advantages, could any true philosopher, good citizen, or wise politician, have continued always indifferent or inactive ? Why should the disciples of Jesus be offended, because such have been raised up to abolish that system which heaven had long ago doomed to destruction, and which the earth could no longer bear ? Should divines and saints be totally silent, and were these philosophers and republicans altogether to hold their peace, *the very stones of the field would cry out*, when the time of destruction is come. Such political systems of religion, as Popery, Mahomedanism, or Pagan idolatry, combined with despotism, are a violation, not of revealed religion only, but of natural : they militate against the light of reason, common sense, morality, the liberties of man, and the welfare of states : in so far, therefore, upon any of these grounds they may be opposed. Idolatry and superstition, slavery and falsehood, present a common

mon mark at which the arrows of reason, or of scripture may be equally shot : and when philosophy, liberty, and enlightened policy, are disposed to join their voice, and lend their aids, on the side of true religion, in combating a common foe, and in removing common nuisances, they ought ever to be welcomed. Even their separate efforts and unintentional services may be very important.

In such cases, the Protestant clergy-man, and the good Christian, need not be ashamed to be found, (while keeping within the limits of their own vocation) on the same side with the patriotic infidel. The former do not change their ground, or their object ;—they do not go over to the camp of infidelity ; but the philosopher, and the infidel, by a superintending Providence, are brought to adopt the views, and to befriend the cause of the Protestant. The zealous defenders of all ancient and existing establishments, with all their errors and iniquities upon their head, who suppose it very consistent with attachment to Christianity, and the principles of free government, for Protestant courts to make a common cause with Pope and Turk, with the Barbarians and Scythians of the North, with Mamalucs, Arabs, and Algerine pirates, in the East and South, hitherto ranked by Protestants among the most noted enemies of Christ, the chief oppressors of the earth, and the refuse of mankind, will not surely account this any paradox.

If in the late and still spreading convulsion of nations, the Lord hath employed the doctrines, aided by the skill and valour, of bold innovators, to shake the throne and strong-holds of iniquity, to demolish the temple of idols, and to free the great part of Europe from a grievous yoke, ought any Protestant to be grieved ? Whether they display the banners of liberty, and boast of their patriotic zeal, in pretence, or in sincerity, should he not rather, like Paul, rejoice, because a great and needful work is done ? a work which the calm influence of religious truth, the demonstrations of reason, and of scripture, and the *still small voice* of the gospel, had not effected, nor could, in the circumstances of these nations, have effected. But of the necessity of the change, and the

the magnitude of such a deliverance, the body of those called Protestants, are now become incompetent judges, either in a civil or religious view, partly from their ignorance, and general indifference, as to the nature and hurtful tendency of the evils abolished, while they themselves have, for so long a time, been happily free from the experience of most of them. The specious tale of a change of the spirit and pernicious maxims of Popery, so often sounded in the ears of Protestants, by the artful friends of Rome, but which the more discerning policy, and the more vigilant spirit of religion in former times, always accounted a chimera and a mere decoy, has at last gained so far on modern credulity, as to reconcile almost all classes of men to the hazardous schemes of a coalition of the incompatible interests, and a confidential co-operation, abroad and at home, some of them formed on the side of established governments, and some of them for their subversion. After a long continued, and well-founded alarm, on the head of popish alliances, and increasing influence of Popery in Britain and Ireland, and after a sudden effervescence and ebullition of zeal, some time ago, on account of a partial extension of liberty to Catholics, that soon evaporated into smoke, all denominations in these kingdoms, political and religious, are now sunk into total apathy in reference to a far more extensive and active system of defence and countenance. While Protestants appear to have forgotten their former jealousy of Romish priests and monks, or are become ashamed of their zeal against a hierarchy, and its superstitions, the never-failing allies of despotism, the new philosophical reformers, and political infidels, seem now alone to inherit them. But the Lord cannot forget, nor will he cease to inflict his vengeance on that kingdom of darkness and of blood, till by their hands, or some others in their stead, he have utterly wasted it. Stroke shall follow stroke, and one messenger shall run to meet another, as in the capture of ancient Babylon, to announce to so many courts and kings the unwelcome tidings, that the great city is smitten, and her strong-holds taken. And those whom he employs in the service he will

will support and reward, till he have performed all his pleasure; though in their hearts they mean not so, but it is their intent to seize the spoil, and to tread down nations, not a few. They shall be allowed, like Cyrus, to parcel out the dominions of the dissolving empire, and to dispose of her hoarded treasures: Unbelieving and atheistical as these conquerors may be, yet as pagan Cyrus opened the prison doors of the oppressed Jews, add proclaimed liberty to every man so disposed, to go up, and rebuild the house of their God, so may these, consistently with their system, open an asylum to the friends of pure Christianity in promoting the kingdom of Jesus. If the comparison be properly stated between the old state of many nations in the world, and that which the new revolutionary principles tend to produce, the change from the former to the latter, considered merely in a political aspect upon religious interests, must, for obvious reasons, be accounted more favourable: for, however ruinous, in every view, atheism would prove, (a system which has never yet been avowed or realized in the government of any nation) or however formidable infidelity, attended with the intolerant spirit and power of persecution, would prove, yet pure deism, as implying an adherence to the principles of natural religion, a regard to morality, and the civil and religious rights of men, however otherwise pernicious, must be, in a political view, far preferable such systems of religion as to Pagan, Popish, or Mahomedan nations many exhibit, combined with their cruel despotism, and persecuting bigotry.

In such days of shaking and alarm, Protestant nations can only be safe by stedfastly maintaining the reformation they have attained; by advancing it where it has been left remarkably imperfect, or where it has declined; by the churches remembering whence they have fallen, repenting and returning to do their first works;—by purging out from among them the remains, and the old working leaven of anti-christianism, and similar evils, whether appearing in the doctrines, the worship, the government, or discipline of the churches, established or tolerated, among them, or in their political laws

laws and constitution. Many such have undoubtedly prevailed to a great degree in Britain and Ireland: many of them do still prevail, call loudly for reformation, and while they are retained, threaten us with a cup of trembling, and confusion, after the manner of other nations, even though the Lord, who is jealous and avengeth, should not require the blood of so many thousand faithful Protestants, sacrificed in former reigns, to the rage of intolerant prelacy, and arbitrary prerogative, in these kingdoms, upon the present impenitent generation, as we have reason to fear he will; as he hath exacted a severe account for the former treachery and cruelties against the professors of the gospel, together with their other and more recent iniquities, from a neighbouring nation, at a time when the spirit and manners of the governors, and people, seemed to be more mild, and after the glowing furnace of persecution seemed almost extinct. It is not in joining in affinity with the people of these abominations, it is not in attempting to prop up the crumbling heaven-struck towers, but in flying to the greatest distance from the falling and burning city, that the safety of any Protestant nation will in the event be found. Not by a blind attachment to old absurdities, and senseless, or hypocritical forms; not by cherishing the spirit of degrading superstition, and servile subjection to men; not by holding up the pageantry of ecclesiastical pride and pomp, or by preserving the dead bones, and dry skeletons of national churches, held together by the mere legaments of state policy, or worldly emoluments, while the flesh, and animating spirit, are departed from them, can the cause of religion be effectually served, or a stable government maintained. It is not by denying, or palliating abuses, when they obviously exist, nor by bearing a heavier hand upon all who may mutter the word Reform;—not by the suppression of knowledge and free enquiry, nor by multiplying severe edicts or penalties against all who may complain of public grievances,—that public peace and safety can always be prolonged. Nor in great public contests, like the present, can the intelligent, and serious part of a nation be kept satisfied, nor dangers be finally ward-
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ed off, by the ostentatious display of public resources, and the spirit of enterprise; by pompously celebrating the occasional and partial victories, which, in a series of complicated operations, Providence may grant, or by magnifying the temporary safety or commercial advantages that may arise from them, while the general state of the quarrel, the counterbalancing evils, and what may be the probable result of the whole, are forgotten, or artfully kept out of view; as children and thoughtless spectators of a deep tragedy, may make themselves very merry at some of the lesser incidents and lighter scenes, utterly insensible to the plot, and what is likely to be the final catastrophe. It is not by shutting their eyes to dangers, and putting "the evil day far away," that a people, in such cases, can expect security, but by investigating and removing the procuring causes of calamity, and the occasions of public discontent; by searching and trying their ways, and turning again to the Lord, "when he arises to shake terribly the earth, to bring down the loftiness of man, and utterly to abolish the idols * :—" "For wheresoever the carcase is, thither will the eagles be gathered together †." It is not by checking the spirit, or postponing the work of reformation, but by hastening speedily to effect it, and by calling in the united efforts of all the conscientious fearers of God, and friends of morality, in the great design, to correct the baneful influence of long-established abuses and systematic corruption on the one hand, and to counteract the attempts of libertines and of ill-intentioned nominal reformers on the other. None but societies and constitutions that are corrupt, and resolutely maintaining their corruptions, can have any thing to fear from the spirit of reformation, even as the man who doth well has no reason to be afraid of the magistrate's power; but to such as do evil, "he beareth not the sword in vain." By a timely and regular reformation, the danger of commotions and innovations are prevented: all the wise and conscientious will be gratified, and rest contented; and hereby the fallacy and evil designs of other pretenders to reform, will be more easily detected and defeated.

The spirit that has gone forth, and the troubles prevailing among the nations, undoubtedly call all to serious reflection, and reverential fear. The awful process which the Lord hath begun against secure, idolatrous, and perse-

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* Isa. ii. 17, 19.

† Mat. xxiv. 28.

cuting states, is not yet closed, and we are afraid, that the language and the tendency of it are not yet duly understood. Britain, in particular, seems to be peculiarly averse to receive the instruction, and gives no evidence of profiting by the examples set before her eyes; it is likely, therefore, that the greatest crisis of her danger may be yet to come. These men, who are eminently God's sword and battle-axe, whose rage she hath defied and provoked, or those strange and ungodly alliances she hath lately courted, or both of them together, may probably prove her scourge, if not her ruin. But though a nation may be irreclaimable, and though rulers may refuse to listen to the alarming admonition, surely none of the churches of Christ should at such a time be asleep; nor should their faithful watchmen keep silence, lest when they cease to warn the wicked of the evil of their way, the sword should come, and cut them off in their iniquity, and their blood be required at their hand. What can be more applicable to such events and days as these, than the descriptions and admonitions contained in the 50th and 51st chapters of Jeremiah, throughout, especially as they are applied and illustrated in the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. In reading the following verses, the hearts of all may *meditate terror*, and the friends of Zion may have hope; nor need any consider such declarations, and the common application of the language and imagery, to the Papal kingdom, so long familiar to the ears of Protestants, as an antiquated tale, when the mighty Redeemer is in the midst of the execution of his determined work, from which he will not be diverted, either by the petty interests of nations, the political intrigues of cabinets, or the combination of armies.

"Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand,
 "that made all the earth drunken; the nations have
 "drunken of her wine, therefore the nations are mad.
 "Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her,
 "take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. We
 "would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed; for-
 "sake her, and let us go every one into his own country;
 "for her judgement reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up
 "even to the skies. The Lord hath brought forth our
 "righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work
 "of the Lord our God. Make bright the arrows;
 "gather the shields:—for his device is, against Ba-
 "bylon

" bylon to destroy it, because it is the vengeance of the
 " Lord, the vengeance of his temple. The Lord hath
 " both devised and done that which he spake against the
 " inhabitants of Babylon. O thou that dwellest upon
 " many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come,
 " and the measure of thy covetousness. The Lord of hosts
 " hath sworn by himself, saying, Surely I will fill thee
 " with men, as with caterpillars; and they shall lift up a
 " shout against thee.—And the land shall tremble and for-
 " row: for every purpose of the Lord shall be performed
 " against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a desola-
 " tion without an inhabitant. The mighty men of Ba-
 " bylon have forborn to fight, they have remained in their
 " holds, their might hath failed, they became as women;
 " they have burnt her dwelling-places, her bars are bro-
 " ken.—The violence done to me and to my flesh, be upon
 " Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say, and my blood
 " upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say.—
 " My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver
 " ye every one his soul from the fierce anger of the Lord.
 " And lest your heart faint, and ye fear for the rumour
 " that shall be heard in the land; a rumour shall both
 " come one year, and after that in another year shall
 " come a rumour, and violence in the land, ruler against
 " ruler. Therefore, behold, the days come, that I will do
 " judgement upon the graven images of Babylon, and her
 " whole land shall be confounded, and all her slain shall fall
 " in the midst of her.—As Babylon hath caused the slain of
 " Israel to fall; so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the
 " earth. Ye that have escaped the sword, go away, stand
 " not still: remember the Lord afar off, and let Jerusalem
 " come into your mind.—Wherefore behold, the days
 " come, saith the Lord, that I will do judgement upon
 " her graven images, and through all her land the wound-
 " ed shall groan. Though Babylon should mount up to
 " heaven, and though she should fortify the height of her
 " strength, yet from me shall spoilers come unto her, saith
 " the Lord. A sound of a cry cometh from Babylon, and
 " great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans: Be-
 " cause the Lord hath spoiled Babylon, and destroyed
 " out of her the great voice; when her waves do roar like
 " great waters, a noise of their voice is uttered. Because
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“ the spoiler is come upon her, even upon Babylon, and
 “ her mighty men are taken, every one of their bows is
 “ broken, for the Lord God of recompences shall surely re-
 “ quite *.”

* Jerem. li. 7.—14. 29. 30. 35. 45.—47. 48. 50. 52. 53. 56.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

CHURCHES, who have had their constitution and profession once settled according to scriptural rule, ought certainly, on all occasions, to act a part suitable to these. They are solemnly enjoined to "remember how they have heard and received, and to do their first works; and to hold fast till the Lord come." Not content with a general assent to a system of principles or rules contained in written formulas, or in standard-books suffered to lie dormant; not indolently reposing their credit for faithfulness upon former deeds, in order that a religious profession may be preserved in life and vigour, and that principles may have their practical operation, it will be necessary, from time to time, to revive afresh the memory of them, and by all the ways competent to a church, frequently to exhibit them to the minds, and apply them to the actions of men, according to the occurring circumstances and calls of Providence. If they cease from their progressive and constant exertion, a similar effect must happen to them, as to individuals, in the description of the poet,

The reputation
Of virtuous actions past, if not kept up
With an access, and fresh supply of new ones,
Is lost and soon forgotten; and like palaces,
For want of habitation and repair,
Dissolve to heaps of ruins —.

There are more ways than one of losing the spirit of a religious profession; this may be as really produced by negligent omissions and evasion, as by direct renunciation. The greater part of those who have departed from the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, in late times, have not done it by openly denying or reasoning against them, but by dropping them in silence, and declining, on proper occasions, to introduce them. The same danger may be apprehended in reference to other matters about which a church may contend; for the testimony of Christians is very far from being confined to a few doctrines immediately respecting the justification and salvation

vation of sinners. A body, associated for opposing a torrent of prevailing evils, and for promoting reformation, like that with which the writer of this hath been long connected, has especially need to be observant of the course of public events, the state and tendency of controversies, and of public opinion, and to embrace opportunities of exciting attention to objects which they judge to be of common utility and importance, and to shew that their Testimony is not employed only about the corruptions or attainments of a former age, without respect to the present.

The late commotions abroad and at home, in their commencement and progress, presented something very interesting to the consideration of churches as well as states. The judicatories of the Secession, who had formerly explained their views so particularly on the principal subject of the preceding Declaration, had in these a new and pressing call to remind their people and the generation of the duty of civil obedience, and of the necessity and obligation to promote reformation, when either the one or the other of these was in danger of being forgotten; and to lift up their directing and warning voice amidst the tumultuous scenes and awful providences taking place. They might have considered themselves, like Esther, as come to their station and authority, for such a time, and for such a service, as this. Even though no accusations or dangers had been particularly pointed at them, the care of their flocks, regard to the ends of their association, and to the general interests of the kingdom of Christ, demanded this at their hands; and something of this kind, it may be supposed, was generally expected from them. That valuable Declaration and Defence of our principles relating to civil government, from which the leading sentiments in the preceding are taken, and the SOLEMN WARNING, long ago published by the Synod, are now little known, even among their own people. The former, too, is perhaps rendered of less general usefulness, on account of its connection with a personal process, and a temporary controversy.

Though individuals, in the course of their ministry, may be careful to discharge their public duty, yet this can be no reason for Courts continuing silent. Every thing of this kind must appear with far greater advantage and force, when it speaks the minds of the representatives of a whole body, and when it comes with the sound of a multitude, as the voice of many waters. The former is like an assault by a single arm, and one by one; the other as the joint onset of a whole army.

For these considerations, and others mentioned in the introduction, the writer of this, after he had tried, in vain, to obtain a joint concurrence in the Presbytery of which he is a member, in expressing some judgement, and in giving some admonition, relative to the state of public affairs, and after he had attempted to publish something of a similar import, for
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his own exoneration*, wished much to hear the General Synod speaking in their own name, and pleading their own cause. He had no doubt but that they were convinced of the necessity of this, when they enjoined the business to be brought forward, and that they sincerely meant to improve the critical opportunity, the like to which they may never behold again, while any now in office have a place on the mortal stage. In this confidence the foregoing paper was offered, in expectation that either that, or something in place of it, framed in their own manner, and to their own liking, would, with all convenient speed, receive a sanction from the Synod. In this, however, he is sorry to say, he has been entirely disappointed. If they ever seriously intended to enact any thing upon the subject, their thoughts have changed, or their zeal has relaxed; and in the event they have shrunk back from the task: Nor is this the only business of a public nature, of late years, that hath been either shuffled over, or laid for ever to sleep, after being formally introduced to the consideration of the Court.

From the beginning, indeed, some had shewed a disinclination to have any thing on this subject introduced. No sooner was it entered upon, than it became apparent that a number were not disposed to give it a favourable, or even a patient hearing. A clamour instantly arose, in which some attempted to renew the debate, though entirely out of order, about the propriety of any Overture at all, which had been determined at the previous meeting. Upon reading that part of the preamble that took notice of aspersions cast upon the whole body of Dissenters and Seceders, as mentioned in a publication, bearing the name of a member of Court, (p. 2.), that brother, in great heat, complained of this as an injury done to him; objecting, and in form protesting, against any farther procedure in that cause: upon which he immediately left the house, not returning to take his seat again till the business was disposed of: though all the ground of complaint was the rehearal or bare reference to a matter of fact, sufficiently notour to all the world, introduced solely for the purpose of evincing the propriety of the Synod's attempting some vindication; without precluding that brother from his right of exculpating himself as to that or any other particular contained in that publication, in the proper time and order†. But if the Synod thought themselves,

* Particularly in "*The Difference between the Old Dissenters in Scotland, and other Presbyterians, on the head of Magistracy.*"—"*A Serious View of the Remarkable Providences of the Time, and a Warning, &c. with the Illustrations subjoined,*" &c. &c.

† It is to be observed, that there was then an order of Synod for inspecting and reporting upon the contents of that publication,

selves, or the body they belong to, to be publicly injured; they had surely a prior right, if they pleased, to exculpate themselves.

Though after this the reading proceeded without interruption, it was obvious, that before the dismissal that evening, near midnight, a very small proportion of the members were present: he remarks this, because next day a greater number scrupled not to take a share in the vote. Though the lateness of the hour might plead the excuse of some, yet it could hardly be sustained for all: it may too often be observed, though little to the praise of the judgement of modern Seceders, that

blication, in consequence of a very general dissatisfaction expressed by members of Court and others, on account of several things in it, though the duty of loyalty and obedience to civil rulers, as hitherto maintained among Seceders, was none of them. If there was any degree of disapprobation of the manner in which these aspersions had been mentioned in the Essays, expressed in the preamble, this is what would unavoidably arise in the breast of every one concerned, upon reading these passages; and was farther justified by the result of an extrajudicial conversation, in a Committee of the whole House, at the former meeting, in which almost all present (and the meeting was very full) expressed their marked displeasure with that and other things in that pamphlet, while not the smallest degree of acknowledgement was offered by the author for obviating any offence it had occasioned. This produced the appointment of a judicial inquiry, though the Synod either have not yet found leisure, or have not been disposed to travel farther in this affair.

In the vehement declamation that preceded that brother's protest, deviating from the case in hand, he began to find fault with that appointment, though, when apprised of the general offence, and while he considered himself as an honoured sufferer for having done his duty, he should have been the last to complain of having a fair opportunity granted him of doing justice to himself and his cause. Being in that instance out of order, little or no reply was made to him at that time on that head; nor did the Court then appear sufficiently calm to listen to any. The personal reflections that accompanied his invective against the writer of that paper, for the share he had in any of these proceedings, he made little account of, while he was engaged in causes of a public nature, acting in them according to his own best judgement, and, at the same time, as a servant and subject of the Court. With that member he never had any personal quarrel, though the public questions, on which he may widely differ from him, are, of late, but too numerous and momentous.

that causes or discussions relating to the general interests of religion, or to the whole body, are seldom seen, so much or so long, to engage attention, as scenes of unchristian litigation, wherein parties eagerly prosecute their local and petty differences, and vent their angry passions and scurrilities against each other. These last, not rarely, will occupy many long days, and sometimes keep many hundreds of people awake, and clustering in Synod-houses, or in open churches, through all the hours of night.—It were to be wished, that there had not been reason to suspect some members of spending part of the time that evening unnecessarily and impertinently, “as the manner of some is,” in the adjoining room of noise and entertainment, waiting to see the conclusion, with some other view than to be in case to form a deliberate and impartial judgement about the subject of discussion. We have heard of a practice, well known in the secret history of a certain high and honourable House, of some who have obtained seats in it, but are too much the gentlemen of fashion and spirit to trouble themselves with the drudgery and tedious detail of Parliamentary business, who yet, on particular occasions, will not fail to be attending within call, to give the decisive YEA or NAY; or, in their fox-hunting dialect, though they decline the fatigue of the chase, they take care to be in at the death.

When the Synod proceeded to judgement, instead of adopting the foregoing Declaration or Vindication as their own, a great majority agreed to re-commit the business to another committee *de novo*. This, doubtless, in all such cases, they have full power to do, or wholly to dismiss it, upon proper reasons assigned, provided they do nothing against the truth, nor fail in the discharge of any part of their public duty. Reasons satisfactory, at least to the judgement of the proposer, in this case, were not adduced: nor was any thing offered as a substitute for fulfilling, in a speedy, as well as better manner, the intent of the Overture. He could not consider the general observation of a certain brother on the manner and composition of the paper, as a sufficient reason for rejecting, or even deferring the business *sine die*. In matters of a serious importance, the affair of words and manner must always be points of a very inferior consideration: To all of these, especially in dealing with common people, every minute and pedantic rule of modern criticism would be but idly and impertinently applied. The same mode of composition can neither be prescribed to all persons, nor be adapted to all subjects and kind of writing. “For meats,” said Paul, “destroyest thou the work of God?” For the sake of words, or capricious modes, shall needful truths be suppressed, or urgent business be hindered? There are some, and too many modern divines among the number, who account it a more venial fault to utter heterodox and dangerous sentiments, than to be guilty of

a grammatical impropriety ; and they will grant more indulgence to him who subverts the order of law and gospel, or who breaks any of the divine commandments, and teaches men so, than to one who offends in the arrangement of a period, or violates perhaps some frivolous, or unsettled rule of a Lowth or Blair.

Dant veniam corvis, vexant censura columbas.

The Declaration, at any rate, both as to matter and manner, was under the review of Synod, and waiting their alterations and corrections.

There was not more force in the objection of the same brother from the west, (who has distinguished himself so much as a warm partizan of the high-flying Toryism and Antichristian warfare of these days), namely, that the paper was a defence of the Societies, meaning, those of "The Friends of the People;" for at that time, the clandestine dangerous societies that have since risen were not heard of. But whether the cause of these Societies was defended, or how far, every one may judge. Whoever weighs impartially what was said on that head, will probably be of opinion, that the contrary conclusion might, with as much truth, be drawn ; as was very properly observed by another member of Court at that time. Were it to the purpose for the writer to disclose his real sentiments upon such a subject, few perhaps would be found, who have less confident expectations of good to arise from the sudden ebullition of popular zeal, or who entertain a less high opinion of hasty coalitions, irregular assemblies, tumultuous proceedings, and precipitant resolves, sometimes the fruit of it. He has had sufficient occasion to learn, from too many instances, how these usually terminate, to prevent him from being forward to bestow upon them a large measure of applause, or to hail such appearances as auspicious. Friend as he is to reform of every kind, and to popular liberty, he never expected to see a real and permanent reform effected by the upstart patriots of a day, by a set of pert noisy praters, by clubs, composed, perhaps, for the greater part, of rash and hot-headed striplings, without reflection, without experience, without fixed principle, and without persevering integrity. All such mobbish conventions must prove like a rope of sand. Those who compose them are not more remarkable for the forwardness and impetuosity of their proceedings in the beginning, than they usually are afterwards for the timidity and rapidity of their retreat, upon the approach of danger or difficulty ; when every one, in the haste to save himself, will not scruple to betray his associates, and the cause ; all of them, perhaps, basely deserting those very individuals, whom their activity pushed forward to the conspicuous posts of hazardous responsibility, and unfeelingly

feelingly looking on, while their persons or property pay the forfeit for their credulity in relying on their promised support. It is not by persons of such a spirit, nor by such means, that the public weal, in critical times, can be greatly benefited. But what is the good work that may not be mismanaged? or where is the cause that may not meet with false friends?

With the Synod's determination in this cause, the writer at the time was grieved: he could not but consider it as an instance of fainting, at any rate, of improper delay and slackness, in a part of public duty that required dispatch. But as the business was not finally dismissed, but re-committed, he was disposed to say the less, contenting himself with expressing his opinion verbally, while he had some prospect of another overture being prepared, and the matter at last brought to a desirable conclusion. He was averse to put the harshest construction upon the motives and intentions of the Court; but was disposed to impute the failure of this attempt to the defects or improprieties of the draught then presented, rather than to a dislike in the minds of any to some of the principles contained in it, or to the scope and spirit of it. He therefore abstained from making any other complaint, or taking any other active step, at that time, lest it might have been interpreted, as arising from some undue partiality to any thing in which he himself had a particular hand, a weakness which all need carefully to avoid, or lest it might appear to be only contending about a particular manner of doing the work, rather than a regard to the cause itself. In these views, he waited from Synod to Synod, expecting to have a new draught called for and presented; but he waited to no purpose; a dead silence was always observed on the subject; till at the last meeting in August, he was obliged to remind the Synod of that appointment, and to move, That the report should be called for. This could not well be refused. The report was, "That nothing had been done by the Committee." Upon which, another member of Court instantly moved, That the appointment of the Committee be discontinued, and discharged from the minutes of Synod. Which, to his surprise, was as instantly agreed to, *nemine contradicente*.

For this deed, no reason whatever was given; every one therefore is left to put upon it what construction he pleases. It may mean, either that it is now the opinion of the Court, that the circumstances of the times do not render any thing of the kind required in the Overtures, necessary; or, that the Angels of our churches are not prepared with their trumpets to give a certain sound; or, that there are certain considerations of the prudential mind, or what may be usually so called, that determine them to forbear, as regard to peace among themselves, fear of encountering public prejudices, giving offence to those in power, or the like. But in whatever light it be viewed, many will think, that it leaves an imputation either

on the discernment, the consistency, or the faithfulness of the Supreme Court. There are indeed but too many symptoms of the spirit of counsel, of decision, of vigorous zeal, as well as of unanimity in the public cause of God, being departed from the judicatories of the Secession, of whom it was hoped, that, like Judah, they would long have "ruled with God, and been faithful with the saints." It will also be a grievous stroke upon their own churches, and on the generation, if, amidst the other dangers of these times, the words of the prophet be verified also upon them: "Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision, and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine, and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer of God *." From what has occurred in a course of years past, there is reason to apprehend, that a comfortable progress in their public contendings and Testimony is denied them; but that the *facilis descensus*, the retrograde path, is only accessible to them.

The reader by this time may perceive why the foregoing Declaration is brought forward to public view, with the name of an individual prefixed to it; and also in what light to consider it. It was not from any satisfaction that he takes in the troublesome and expensive task of writing and publishing on such subjects, to which he well knows the taste of the age to be stately averse; much less from any pleasure he takes in differing, or pursuing a different tract, from his brethren, whom he esteems and loves in the Lord,—that he hath taken this course. But he deemed it needful to supply, in part, "their lack of service." Hereby he addresses them, as he did before, in terms like these:

———Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti: si non his utere mecum.

HOR. EP. I. 1.

As every member of a body is particularly interested in the charges brought against the whole, so he has availed himself of a right pertaining to each apart, of vindicating himself in the justification of the common cause, by attempting to give the just state of those points most subject to misrepresentation, and that are viewed as most obnoxious; to hold forth the sentiments undisguised upon certain topics, which either the letter or spirit of his religious profession warrant; and to discriminate intentions and conduct that may be laudable, from those that are criminal, when they are ready to be confounded

* Mic. iii. 6. 7.

APPENDIX.

founded together. In this he did not propose either to introduce new principles, or to give a full statement of the old, nor to enter into the large field of illustration or argument, but to turn the attention to such articles as bear some relation to, and seem to come into contact with certain subjects of living disputes. He has not, to his knowledge, advanced any thing on those subjects, but what he was virtually bound both to believe and teach, when at licence and ordination, in common with all his brethren, he gave his assent to this question, "Are you satisfied with, and do you purpose to adhere unto and maintain the principles about the present civil government, which are declared and maintained in the Associate Presbytery's Answers to Mr Nairn's Reasons of Dissent, with the Defence thereto subjoined." These are not less the genuine principles of the Secession, that the present judicatories may refuse their sanction to a new declaration of them, and leave the world to guess at their present sentiments upon any of these subjects, in the best manner they can. Even the real principles formerly adopted by the Synod, can no longer be considered as theirs than they may be willing to own them; much less sentiments not according with these. If there be any thing, therefore, offensive or amiss in the foregoing statement, the publisher alone must bear the blame. The Synod have fairly exculpated themselves.

How far a change of sentiments in regard to some of the principles contained in it, particularly in pages 25. 28. and 31. may have prevented their enacting this, and some other Overtures formerly presented, he will not pretend to say. He did not at first allow himself to suspect this to be any part of the cause; but it can now no longer be concealed, nor do they wish to have it concealed, that the majority of Synod have adopted different views about national reformation, national covenants, and the distinct interest which both political and ecclesiastical bodies have, and the part they should severally act in reforming, settling, and promoting religion in nations, and other things connected with these. In these particulars they are departing, it may be said are already departed, from the former principles of their own society, and of all the Protestant churches; as appears from the progress made towards the reception of a new Testimony, and from some late acts of Synod, appointing a change in the Formula, to be subscribed by all in public office, and affecting the terms of ministerial and Christian communion, the one condemning part of the doctrine in the Confession of Faith, without substituting any thing else in its place, and even without a mouth being opened on the merits of the cause; the other for suspending covenanting for the present, till it may be done in a manner more adapted to present circumstances; or, perhaps more properly, to the new scheme of principles; a scheme that, in the opinion

nion of the writer, tends to sacrifice the boasted reformation of Scotland, and of other lands, to the spite and scorn of sectarian anarchists, and in its latitude makes a near approach to the worst and most mischievous part of the Revolutionary system of modern infidels, that totally divorces government from religion, and would abolish every authorized form or national system of the latter. But on these affecting subjects, he imposes silence on himself, and would gladly do it for ever, if he can be but suffered to maintain his first profession and engagements, free from the imperious encroachments of innovation and imposition. But when the silver cord of the common profession of a religious body comes to be loosed, it forebodes its approaching dissolution. May such an event in our case, be yet in mercy averted!



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